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CATHOLIC MYSTICISM

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CATHOLIC MYSTICISM

POPULAR LECTURES

BY

A. J. FRANCIS STANTON

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“The world is not for our enjoyment. The things that are for our enjoyment are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”—ST. AUGUSTINE.

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PREFACE

THE lectures here published by request were delivered in the Corpus Christi Hall, Portsmouth, at the kind invitation of the Rector, Father Raab, in March and April of the present year, 1928, to an audience for the most part Catholic.

The cordial reception given them was a pleasing proof of a real interest in matters relating to Catholic mysticism.

It is self-evident that they are popular and practical, rather than academic. No verbal inconsistencies or literary dismerit can, however, be really prejudicial to such a theme. The value of the lectures, as such, may be questioned, but the value and need of contemplative prayer, in the cloister and out of it, will not be questioned by any seriously minded person awake to the need revealed by the time-spirit. Within the narrow limits of such lectures, one can but refer superficially to the great wealth of material on the subject. Also, there is in lectures a certain amount of unavoidable repetition.

Among subjects of first-class importance the Catholic Faith stands by itself, pre-eminent. It is the subject of subjects ; not one thing, but everything. Without it, all life loses its life. To restore the Catholic Faith to our beloved land, it is my profound conviction that a revival of contemplative prayer will be most effective.

Our Blessed Lord wishes for quiet in the soul, that His voice may be heard amidst the discord of earth. He wants the need for quiet to be preached in the great hospital of the world.

Men would become Catholics if we Catholics could become saints. Such a hope for the worst of us is not presumption, if we remember that every rung of the ladder is labelled humble prayer. Our Holy Mother the Church at least calls us to this ideal, to nothing short of a perfection which, if attained in this world, will be to God's greater glory, inasmuch as here one acts : in purgatory one is acted upon.

It is my hope that these lectures may recall some of the impressions made during their delivery, and also furnish material for meditation.

St. Teresa said : " Our Lord would be doing you no small favour if He enabled you to

persuade some one to practise prayer.” With this purpose I commend these lectures to Our Blessed Lady, Mary Immaculate. If what has been said is of any use, it will be owing to her intercession and to the prayers of Carthusians and Carmelites offered for this intention.

A. J. FRANCIS STANTON.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL,
1928, HOVE, SUSSEX.

ROSA MYSTICA

Hail ! Mystic Rose,
Heavenly Flower ;
On earth
Not less rare
Than Gabriel
In the Garden,
Of courtesy angelic.

Hail ! Mystic Rose,
Heavenly Flower
In Paradise ;
Whose Perfume
Is the odour
Of sinners' prayers
Immaculate through Thee.

Hail ! Mystic Rose,
God-shadowed,
That might blossom
In the wilderness
Thorn-shadowed,
The Rose of Sharon.

A. J. F. S.

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CATHOLIC MYSTICISM

CATHOLIC MYSTICISM : WHAT IT IS NOT

THE title of these lectures may sound overwhelming, even with the disarming prefix—"popular," but I am not unmindful of the difficulties. Père Poulain, of the Society of Jesus, one of the greatest authorities of the twentieth century on this subject, says about his book, *The Graces of Interior Prayer* : "For the last forty years I have studied steadily in view of it." Abbot Butler of Downside says of his *Western Mysticism* : "This book has been twenty years in the making." And Baron von Hugel, referring to that standard work of which he is the author, namely, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, tells us that "the following work embodies well-nigh all that the writer has been able to learn and test in the matter of religion during now some thirty years of adult life : and even the actual composition of the book has occupied a large part of his time for seven years and more." If this were not enough to discourage an amateur, I find in Fr. Hugh Pope's translation of St. Thomas Aquinas on *Prayer*

and the Contemplative Life, these words : “ It has become the fashion to talk about Mysticism, and even to pose as Mystics, and, need it be said, those who talk the most on such subjects are those who know the least.”

You will therefore quite understand that in the brief space of these lectures I am not attempting anything more than to warn you of the commonest dangers of false mysticism, and to point to the uphill road of peace where you will meet the great mystics. It is they, not I, whom I am proposing to you as teachers of Catholic mysticism. My own hope is that I may arouse interest where it does not now exist, and that I may be able to put those who are interested on the track of leading ideas, principles and literature.

To make a beginning we cannot do better than imitate the method of that master of reasoning, St. Thomas Aquinas, “ by setting down the opinion from which we differ,” and clearing the ground for the study of Catholic mysticism by showing what it is *not*.

It may seem superfluous to say that Catholic mysticism is neither Protestant nor pagan mysticism ; but what appears to be a mere platitude

is, in this case, a practical necessity and a first principle of our study of the subject. Catholic mysticism is the *experimental* knowledge of God, attained by men and women who have set out from certain first principles called the Catholic Faith. These first principles are based on Divine Supernatural Revelation, safeguarded by Apostolic Authority. I need not, therefore, stress the importance—more, the absolute necessity—of beginning the study of Catholic mysticism where the mystics themselves began—with the foundation facts of Catholic belief which are called dogmas.

It is the Catholic Faith that God made man to know Him, serve Him, and love Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next. There you have, in a nutshell, the Catholic Faith concerning the relations of God and man—Creator and creature. God known by the mind through reason and faith, God known by the character through moral obedience, God known by the heart's core through love. God known by the mind through reason and faith—that is the science of theology; God known by the conscience, by the character, through moral obedience—that is the science of asceticism; God known by the heart through

love—God known by attentive love—God, who is a Person known intimately as friend may know friend—that is the mystical science which we shall consider in these lectures. These three parts, theology, asceticism and mysticism, make the perfect whole.

Theology is the intellectual knowledge of God, asceticism is the moral knowledge of God, mysticism is the experimental knowledge of God by attentive love and humble sympathy with His Mind and Heart. Separate them, and you will never find the way of the Catholic mystics, for half a truth is no truth, half a science is no science.

Common enough, alas, are the examples of those students of mysticism who tried to do without one or other of these three parts of the knowledge of God. There is the old trouble of faith without works, and the modern trouble of works without faith, and the fashionable trouble of trying to do without both and putting in their place “absorption into the All.” Mysticism without dogmatic theology as a basis means an unprovided intellect, which, being at a loose end, will restlessly try to translate its experiences into a home-made theology, an occupation before which the greatest and most

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highly-trained intellect might quail, since an unaided intellect cannot grapple with infinite truth. God became man that by the Word Incarnate might be put into human speech the fundamental facts of the relations between God and man, for it was necessary that His meaning should be as clear to the child, and the peasant, as to the scholar. The business of the Catholic Church has been to guard, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that definite deposit of truth given us by the Word Incarnate, which is the sum of all our human knowledge of eternal things. This deposit of truth provides for the demands of our mind, our conscience, and our heart. By faith, the mind takes it and is satisfied, but never satiated; by good will the conscience recognises it as right and just, and rejoices in the law of God; by love our heart, the very core of the personality, goes out to clasp and acclaim this truth, crying: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The Catholic mystics knew God with all three faculties of their being—and their joy was full. They sought and they received good measure, pressed down and running over. This is the crux of the matter—the reason for their success and for the failure of others. For

if faith without works is dead, and if morality without adequate theology and without love is impossible, still more is mysticism impossible without theology and morality. That way lies madness and fanaticism. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Not with a pointing finger, but with a gesture of pity, we may instance Nikolai Gogol, the Russian novelist, a man of genius with an extraordinary power of actuality. His biographer tells of him that "he was ever in spiritual torment . . . he could never get away from . . . a profound spiritual craving. He was struggling all the time with his own imperfections. He went on pilgrimages to Rome and to Palestine in the hope of bringing himself nearer to the light, and spent all night in prayer at the Holy Sepulchre." Finally, desperately, he made a burnt-offering of his manuscripts. "He fasted to death. A few days before the end he wrote: 'Have mercy on me, O Lord! Bind Satan again through the power of the mysterious Cross!'" His last words were a symbolic cry: "Give me the ladder! the ladder!" A wise spiritual director could have taught Nikolai Gogol that obedience is better than sacrifice—"the depth

and not the tumult of the soul"—and that God must be obeyed when He bids every man to hope and trust, and to find his strength in quietness and confidence. Very different were the fasts and vigils of St. Francis, for deepest anguish of the saints and the mystics is based on humble trust, and is subject to child-like obedience. One can only pray that such souls as Gogol's found the ladder out of the depths from which they cry. Thank God we have no need to cry out desperately for ladders, for we have the great, permanent stairway of the Catholic Faith.

Therefore, with deepest gratitude to God for the gift of this faith, at the outset of these lectures, I humbly make my own the words of that great Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross: "I accept the aid of experience and learning, and if through ignorance I should err, it is not my intention to depart from the sound doctrine of our Holy Mother the Church. I resign myself absolutely to her light, and submit to her decisions."

Having said so much concerning the necessary relation of theology and asceticism to mysticism, is there any need for me to answer the usual non-Catholic criticism concerning any Catholic point of view, which is: How can a Catholic

study any such subject impartially, when his field of operations is limited by the Church? I am not lecturing about mysticism, but only about Catholic mysticism. I hope, however, that by the end of this brief course of lectures considerable light will have been thrown on mysticism in general, *by comparison*. Our governing principles are Catholic; our Faith, that, once for all delivered to the saints. Anything calling itself mysticism, which directly opposes, or contradicts, the Catholic Faith, cannot have a divine origin. The Church is the natural home of the mystic, where is safety, certainty, ballast, and direction. There is much talk outside the Church of a reaction against dogma and authority. Too often, this nebulous school, aware that it must have a non-committal religious vocabulary, takes to itself the words "mystic" and "mystical," with an idea that these words may be independent of dogma, or authority of any kind. Hence—true mysticism may be suspect by those unacquainted with the lives and principles of Catholic mystics. Catholic mystics are themselves the best refutation of such misconceptions about true mysticism. Anyone who will but make a study of them, must be . . . fully aware that the great Catholic

mystics owe their greatness to the safeguarding dogmas and commandments, on which high road they were able to travel so far into the mysteries of the love of God.

To anyone who has an idea that mysticism is a dangerous subject for study, because of the many mystically inclined souls who have gone astray, I would point out that mysticism is no more brought into disrepute because there have been false mystics than theology is made a dubious science because of heresy, or asceticism a dangerous study because of wild moralists like the Manicheans. The whole object of this lecture is to point out the danger line, which is so clearly defined for Catholics.

In my pre-Catholic days, when I browsed without let or hindrance over the questionable pasturage of non-Catholic mysticism, the only way to prove whether it was providing me with nourishing food, or poisonous weed, was to eat it—and wait. Had the Catholic Faith been my guide I should have been saved the trouble of getting more than one poison out of my spiritual system.

My own personal interest in mysticism was, I think, simultaneous with my interest in

religion at all. I find that I had copied into an old commonplace book, many years ago, these words from John Pulsford, a Nonconformist minister of the last century : “ Man is no better than a leaf driven by the wind until he has completely mastered his great lonely duties. If he has no habit of retiring from all that is world, and of conversing with his inner man face to face, if he does not alone invite the gaze of God, if he does not draw down upon his soul the powers of the world to come, he is no man yet ; he has not found the life of man nor the strength of man. He is a poor, unhappy creature, sporting only with shadows and affrighted before the real and the eternal. He owns a great house, a wonderful house, but it is shut up, and he lives outside with his fellow cattle. The inside is wholly unknown to him, and he has lived outside so long that he is afraid of the inside.” These words speak of one part of mysticism—the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of God within us. I had also copied some words from Walter Pater, which speak of the other side of mysticism, the knowledge of all things as they stand in relation to God, their place and proportion in His Kingdom : “ Every object in the terrestrial world is an

analogue, a symbol or counterpart of some higher reality in the starry heavens, and this again of some law of the angelic life in the world beyond the stars."

This dual knowledge—to discover God actually dwelling in all things, in all created things, people, places, and events, and to discover how all things dwell in God who masters and transcends them all—was my quest in those days. I came to see, as Fr. Sharpe says—"Therefore *that* God is may be clearly known from the 'visible things' of creation. But *what* God is in Himself, no man can know, unless God Himself reveals it to Him. To see the reflection of Divine beauty is one thing: to see God is another. For all man's natural knowledge comes from creatures, and by way of sensation; and God is the one being that is not a creature, and of whom sensation can directly tell us nothing. This being so, the only direct, immediate or experimental knowledge of God that man can attain to must be supernaturally bestowed upon him." The mystic realises that it is the world which is all astray, in dangerous dreaming wherein material things are taken for real, and a man's centre of gravity is self. He cries, in the words of Eckhart:

“ God is near us, but we are far from Him ; God is within, we are without ; God is at home, we are in the far country.”

Mysticism is not an occult science reserved for the meditation of an esoteric aristocracy. Father Devine says : “ We must not suppose that there is in the Church some occult science, the secret of which is reserved for the initiated ; but that there is a science of the mysterious called mystical theology. This science may be called secret in the sense that the great things of God are secret.” Our Blessed Lord said : “ If I have spoken to you earthly things, and you believe not, how will you believe if I shall speak to you heavenly things ? ” To His own disciples He said : “ To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.”

The seeking for knowledge of hidden things for its own sake is, as Evelyn Underhill points out so admirably, not mysticism, but magic, not supernatural, but selfish. But would-be mystics of this kind do not often travel very far along the mystic way, for the cost is too great. The radiance of the illuminative way—the second stage in the mystical way—is only reached by the humble, painstaking, hard work

on the knees of the purgative way ; and beyond the illuminative way is that dark night of the spirit which only those who journey with Christ can endure in peace, because it is leading them to the unitive way, where they may drink their fill of God, because they have been emptied of all else. Catholic mysticism means seeking to know God by becoming like Him, becoming aware of Him by identity. " It is not enough for man's happiness," says St. Thomas, " that he become like God in power, unless he become like Him in goodness also."

We live in an age which is theoretically overseeded with the supernatural, but is practically materialistic. About us everywhere are unanchored minds with their fever, fret and fume, in dangerous quest for what is mysterious on unconsecrated ground. But even this reveals the natural irritation of man at the discovered disharmony between himself and the sense-world. Human need was never more profound, and although men do not know anything else, they do know, say what they will, that the non-religious solution of life's problems is bankrupt. If this world is not the footstool of God life is an insupportable misery. The human night of sorrow and sin is without a star, and

Lord of All is the Prince of Darkness. The central meaning of life is Calvary—or chaos. All the mechanism of man without spiritual dynamics but multiplies difficulty and misery. But whatever may be the time-spirit of his age, the mystic has invariably possessed those life-qualities for which the rest of mankind are seeking—peace, happiness, joy, certainty, scope for his vital energy, rest for his weariness, a home for his spirit.

I have said that mysticism is not an occult science reserved for the initiated, that it is not a selfish desire for occult powers, that it is not a feverish impatience with human circumstances. Nowadays anything and everything is called mysticism. Outside the Church educated men constantly use the word with a greater lack of pertinence, if that were possible, than they do the word Catholicism. It has been said that in paganism, everything was God except God Himself; in these days the same may be said about mysticism. By the materialist it is regarded as a form of brain weakness, with disordered hair, a wild eye, and an incoherence about things that matter. Any idealist or dreamer is called a mystic. A leading daily called Ramsay Macdonald a mystic the

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other day, because he referred to the shade of the late Lord Oxford haunting the Houses of Parliament. The world is curious concerning mysticism, but it cannot be troubled to stop in its wild rush to nowhere in particular to learn what it is. It wants to know about it as a medical student once wrote to a friend of mine : " Could you tell me, on a postcard, what *is* mysticism ? "

Some time ago I asked in a pretentious book-shop, what books they had on mysticism. I was directed to a row of books on subjects ranging from palmistry to pantheism, symbolism of all kinds, the curative effect of colour, how to take your horoscope, how to breathe through the solar plexus, and so on. God was hardly referred to. *And yet the whole subject of the mystic's study is God.* Not himself, not his own spirit, not the angels, neither heaven nor earth, but God's very self. That is the touchstone of true mysticism.

A curious feature of our day is the perfumed mysticism of the West End drawing-room. St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross are read side by side with Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Asceticism of the sternest order is read in an environment where all the senses

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are pampered. It may be read, but under those circumstances it cannot be realised.

Catholic mysticism repudiates spiritualism, that Nemesis of a materialistic age which has been made semi-respectable in our age by Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. My own opinion of this subject, based on my own experiences in pre-Catholic days, when it was one of the strange pastures I sampled to see whether it was good—having no other means of knowing—is that it is the greater part fraud, a certain percentage to be explained in terms of the subconscious mind, and that a small percentage cannot be explained except as diabolic, or at least infinitely dangerous and harmful. Anyway, it is forbidden by the Church, and Catholics are reminded from the Eternal City, which has seen so many civilisations rise and fall, that spiritism is no new discovery, but that it is the old calling up of the spirits of the dead which comes into fashion every so often in the history of the world, always with deplorable results. Even less, if one can say so, even less than the average Catholic, has the mystic anything to do with spiritism, for he has no anxiety concerning life after death and the fate of his dead. He knows that he has begun already to

live his eternal life with God, and not less completely than he confides his own soul to its Maker, does he confide the souls of those dear to him. He knows all he needs to know, for he would answer inquirers in the mystic's ageless fashion : " The souls of my dead are in the hand of God, that is all I know about them, *for I know Whom I have believed.*"

The mystic, again, may produce literature, poetry, painting, or music, but these are not mysticism. With wise guidance one may study mystical literature—or some of it, because even he who runs could never read it all—considering it from the philosophic, or even psycho-physiological point of view. This latter is a branch of modern psychology having reference to the borderland between mind and body, to which Coventry Patmore, I think, referred as " the devil's hunting-grounds." Indeed, it may be well to see in psycho-physiology how diametrically different are the effects of mysticism, and false mysticism or magic, on the mind. The test of true mysticism is its effect of peace of mind and serenity of soul, alike in the excitement of great joy, or the drudgery of every day, or the trouble of suffering. The mystic has a quiet mind ; he has, as I have said before, the sound

mind with a sense for the whole of which Plato speaks ; he possesses his own soul ; he has pre-eminently the mental health which comes from a unified personality, which is largely due to his having necessarily schooled himself to live in the present moment, to concentrate on one thing at a time—which the modern nerve specialists are recommending as a specific for all mental ills—and which the mystic does unconsciously with one increasing purpose and will. Compare this with what a French writer, Arcelin, quoted by Mgr. Howley in his *Psychology of Religious Experience*, says : “ The artificial production of states of psychic passivity—which is common in all pseudo-mysticism of Eastern origin—tend to a certain break up of the personality.” The expression of mystically inclined minds, in poetry, painting and music, will tell us whether they are the result of true mysticism, based on first principles, or whether they are only the sighs and impatiences, the dim dreams—pretty enough in their way, but introspective rather than contemplative—of an unsatisfied soul. And an unsatisfied soul is never the soul of a mystic. Coventry Patmore believed that most of the mystics have found their vision unutterable, so great, so complete,

so far beyond their dreams. In one of his poems he says :

“ Views of the unveiled heavens alone forth bring
Prophets who cannot sing,
Praise that in chiming numbers will not run ;
At least, from David unto Dante none,
And none since him.”

We come, then, to the subject of what is called “ nature-mysticism,” and here we must be careful, for unless we have a firm grasp of the fundamental idea of mysticism we may accept too much or else reject too much.

I have said that one part of mysticism is the perceiving of the eternal fact behind the temporal manifestation, or, in other words, the perceiving of all created things in relation to God. This is the knowledge of God without us, beyond our highest longings, better than our best, greater than our most beautiful. Created things God has intended to be the coloured pictures in this nursery and schoolroom of a world, by which we may learn to read. The mystic reads God in creation, and knows that every finite thing is a hint of the infinite and a symbol of the eternal. Spinoza said : “ Things must exist, not only in the manner in which they

are manifested to us, but in every manner which infinite understanding can conceive.”

“No lily-muffled hum of a summer bee
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars ;
No pebble at your foot but proves a sphere,
No chaffinch but implies the cherubim.
. . . . Earth’s cramm’d with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God ;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes ;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

E. B. BROWNING.

This is the true nature-mysticism—the perceiving the mind of the Creator in all that is made—the perceiving God in nature. What is false is any deifying of nature. The mystic takes the flower from the crannied wall, and sees, with Juliana, the anchoress of Norwich, the one truth about it—“that God made it.” As the pure in heart see God, so they see more of Him in His creation than do other people. You have only to read the life of St. Francis of Assisi to know this. Pan—the pagan god of nature—has never taught mankind to consider the lilies, but rather to pluck and trample on them with the muddy boots of sensuality. Francis Thompson said : “No heathen ever saw the same tree as Wordsworth.” To have a

mystical view of nature comes of what is called a mystical temperament, and is rather a tendency to mysticism than the thing itself; a tendency, moreover, that is equally capable of going wrong as of going right. One can only pray that this tendency in a man may find an infallible supernatural guide. This natural tendency to mysticism we find in the agnostic, Richard Jefferies, and in many of the modern English poets. But the Creator must first be known by him who would really know creation. Without the Mind of God, the pageantry of nature's almost infinite beauties is a riddle. Some have made of these beauties a ladder like that for which Gogol cried, and have climbed it for a moment to see spiritual truths. Perhaps no one has seen the true mystic's vision by means of this ladder better than Meredith, who said :

“ Into the Breast that gave the rose
Shall I, with shudd'ring, fall ? ”

But where the poet sees the promised land afar off, the true mystic enters in and dwells there. To sum up, therefore, the truth about nature-mysticism is, that God can be seen in nature because He has clothed Himself with the

whole creation ; but it is only His garment hem. To clasp Him, to know Him by love, the mystic must ever be striving to wake after His likeness, to put on Christ by asceticism, to obey the revelation of His will which was preached by the Apostles.

Catholic mysticism, however, is often confused with asceticism, which is not of its essence, but, as I have said before, is always a concomitant. Asceticism is clearly known and defined, as exact as Euclid and as severe as the Tables of Stone. I would suggest that the relation between mysticism and asceticism may be broadly illustrated by Moses on the Mount of Sinai in the cloud, in the cleft of the rock with God, and Moses descending the mount with the Law. The first is mysticism, the second asceticism. *The Imitation of Christ*, often called a mystical book, is rather ascetical.

Catholic mysticism is not a holiday from one's duties to mankind. It cannot involve a neglect of them ; if it does, it is false mysticism. It is sometimes supposed that a mystic is one who pays no attention to the things of this world, forgetting that one can only see this world by looking away from it, as one only sees the true soul of man in the light of Jesus Christ. No,

the true mystic is not a morbidly emotional, unpractical, and useless cumberer of the marketplace. The exact contrary is true. History witnesses to that. The lives of the great mystics such as St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Sienna, and more particularly St. Teresa, who had extraordinary practical ability, show them as people whom everyone was anxious to consult on worldly affairs, such was their prudence and far-sighted tact and courage. The working-day of any of these mystics I have just named would make a navvy feel tired by the mere hearing of it. I do not say that this is equally true of all periods of their lives. It is common enough to read of a mystic spending years in seclusion, study, and hard ascetic training, silent and forgotten by the world. But on their return to active life, so enlarged by God were they in all their powers that a merchant might have considered their years of retirement to be an admirable investment.

The retirement into solitude was not for the purpose of returning with these increased powers. That is a method only to be found in occultism and false mysticism. The mystics went into the solitary place without reflection

and second thoughts, because God called them there, and their only art, their only desire, was to obey Him; and for the same reason, when they returned and took a hand in affairs of state and civics, in treating with Princes and Popes, in founding monasteries, in the responsibilities of a bishopric, or in being matron of a hospital as was St. Catherine of Genoa, it was simply and solely because God called them there. In solitude or active life, all they cared to find was the will of God. There again you have the test of true mysticism : God the one object of the mystic's quest. The fanatic prefers to contemplate at all costs ; the mystic leaves his contemplation when God knocks at the door in the guise of a beggar, a sick man, or an immediate duty ; or rather, I should say, at the call of God, the true mystic leaves contemplation in his cell for contemplation in the street ; for to the mystic, contemplation becomes as vital as breathing. The seeing eyes of a contemplative are the quickest, wisest eyes in the world, going to the root of all trouble with pity and great good sense.

Catholic mysticism, I need hardly say, has not even a distant relationship with that hotch-potch of ancient religions called Theosophy, or

with that modern error, because it is a lopsided truth, called Christian Science.

Nor does it consist in seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Dean Inge seems to imagine that Catholic mysticism has to do mainly with psycho-physical phenomena, which he calls "a debased supernaturalism." In the preface to his book on mysticism he is unable to refrain from revealing his bitter antagonism to the Catholic Church, though it is hard to say where his book would have been without Catholic mystics. I would emphasise again and again, that Catholic mysticism *is* essentially supernatural. By "debased supernaturalism" Dean Inge means certain psycho-physical concomitants of contemplation which certainly may occur, and often demand our reverence and respect. But, as St. Bonaventure points out; they are not to be desired, and it is safer not to seek them. St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, St. Vincent Ferrer and many other great Catholic mystics, say the same thing. They do not constitute sanctity, and *may* be illusions. The most helpful book I know on this subject, is the life of St. Teresa. Anyhow, my point is, that they are not of the essence of Catholic mysticism. Dean Inge could not read a single one of the Catholic

authorities on mysticism, such as Poulain, Devine, Saudreau, Grou, Scaramelli, Lejeune, and an almost innumerable list of others, nor any of the canonised Catholic saints and mystics, without finding the very reverse of this pointed out as clearly as any teaching could be. Again and again, in the writings of every mystic or mystical student in every generation, it is laid down that visions, trances, ecstasies, even stigmata and the working of miracles, are no criterion of the soul's true mysticism, and are to be feared rather than welcomed. A nun who has ecstasies, or a monk who sees visions, is regarded with something like dismay in the average convent or monastery, and so prudently is silence observed concerning it, that one might almost say it was hushed up ! Why ? Because of the fear of delusions. Any student of the mystics of our day will discover this at the outset. But whatever colours the landscape may have, if a Catholic crosses the vision of Dean Inge, he can see nothing but red. Recognised as an able and well-informed writer on other subjects, it is curious that all his fingers become thumbs when handling the greatest fact in history, namely the Catholic Church. I would say of him, as an authority on mysticism, what,

lacking a sense of humour, he says of some one else : " There is an air of superiority in all his discussions of the lives and doctrines of the mystics, and his hatred and contempt for the Roman Church often warps his judgment." Dean Inge's attitude to life is rationalistic. His antipathies are therefore obvious. And it requires not only a knowledge of objective data, but a certain attitude of mind and heart to approach any subject satisfactorily. How can a man whose *bête-noire* is the Catholic Church do other than fail when he attempts to write of the great mystics who saw everything from her point of view, accepted her first principles, drew their life-blood from her veins, and submitted in all things to her authority ?

Catholic mysticism is never clearer than on the point he raises with regard to psychophysical phenomena. To quote Abbot Butler : " It is a fact to be deplored that devout souls are apt to be frightened off mysticism by the presentations commonly made of it nowadays, whereby it is almost identified with a quasi-miraculous state of visions, revelations, and extraordinary favours frequently affecting the body." Visions have always been suspect in the Church. Spiritual men are well aware that it

is difficult to know from whom a vision comes, or from what. It may be born of frayed nerves or hysteria. In any case, visions and revelations from heaven should never be sought.

St. John of the Cross says : “ One good work or act of the will, wrought in charity, is more precious in the sight of God than that which all the visions and revelations of heaven might effect.” Ecstasies may be caused by drugs, as in the case of De Quincey and William James when the latter experimented on himself. Then there are, of course, natural ecstasies, not produced by artificial means, as instanced in the experiences of Wordsworth and Tennyson. Tennyson said : “ I have never had any revelation through anæsthetics, but a kind of waking trance. This has come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of consciousness of *individuality*, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being.”

Vision or ecstasy may be a concomitant of Catholic mysticism, but it is not of its essence, and this for the reason, that ecstasy is not so much a thing, as the effect of a thing on the body and surface consciousness. And it may

be effected by very different things. The intense communion of true lovers, the vivid and absorbing appreciation of the poet in a bluebell wood, the concentrated will of a man dabbling in magic, forcing the unknown powers of the world to yield up to him somewhat of their secret, or the rushing out of the soul of a saint to welcome the perceived presence of God—any of these experiences may produce ecstasy in the people concerned, though I admit it is, in each, a very different kind of ecstasy. Ecstasy, dreams, visions, voices, sensations, and impressions of the supernatural, none of these are ever sought by the true mystic, and should any of them come to him, he receives them with something like a humble scepticism, reassured only when they prove to have brought him the two mandates of the King which Satan cannot forge—a deepening of humility and a deepening of peace.

Something of the danger of religious emotion may be seen when popular evangelists play on the emotions of a crowd. The effect on morality is often startling, for the depths of hitherto quiet-going personalities are roused to a realisation of their own capacities, and then, with the fading of the emotional stimulus, they are left

unsatisfied. The mystic listens eagerly to those who make an appeal to his *will*, but he bewares of those who appeal to his emotions. Ecstasy, when it comes to the true mystic, is the effect of the glory of God brimming over the finite vessel of his personality, because it is more than his consciousness can hold without displacing the ordinary consciousness of this world.

Catholic mysticism repudiates quietism. Quietism is well defined by Mgr. Howley, who says it is a form of prayer that, practically speaking, "seems to rest in self rather than in God." Madame Guyon and Michael Molinos, who taught this form of prayer, were condemned by the Church as dangerous and their methods as harmful. The Church invariably condemns any method which leads, however indirectly, to the stultifying of the activities of reason and will. The mystic may discard both words and acts of the will in his prayer for a time, but that is because the deepest communion is always a silence of all but love. The mystics would tell you that the powers of the mind and will are to be used in prayer as freely as possible, until such time as God Himself gives to His beloved that sleep of the soul in which they do not act ; but even then it is a sleep in which the

heart watches, and not the reflection on nothing, the fruitless oblivion at which the quietists aimed. The quietist reflects on nothing, so he says, not even God or himself. He desires nothing, not even salvation. He fears nothing, not even hell. And he is indifferent to the use of the Sacraments, or the performance of good works. All fruitless rest of the spirit, that is, all rest that is not "in God," all death that is without resurrection, the Church condemns. Quietism on one hand and on the other Jansenism—that wrong-headed tincture of thought which grew into a dangerous heresy, making God to be terrible and far away and man unworthy even to serve Him—these two extremes, into one or other of which all false mystics tend to fall sooner or later—the Church has condemned, repudiated, and forbidden to her children.

Catholic mysticism has nothing to do with what is called New Thought, that kitten in pursuit of its own tail which is "trying quietly to realise that the Infinite is simply himself." To the teachers of this cult, truth is merely a useful idea, but one not to be caught ; in other words, Pragmatism.

Catholic mysticism has nothing in common with any of these fashionable fantasies or

dangerous dreamings. There are many dangerous religious tendencies in modern days, but none more dangerous than an unbalanced mysticity. Passionate hopes that God, after all, has a high and secret sympathy with the lawless if only they are fearless, wild surmisals about life and activities after death based on curious personal experiences, poems about illegal loves between men and women, in which genius is supposed to be a free pardon and passport from hell to the third heaven—Catholic mysticism has nothing in common with these sublime illogicalities. A Catholic mystic is safe. He is not a celestial Bohemian with permission to deviate wildly from his orbit, or to soar so high, that he is out of sight of the Ten Commandments. Generally the student of mysticism may discriminate thus: the false mystic will be guessing and prying into hidden things, taking all the infinite liberties of the outlaw; but the true mystic will be trying to appreciate the ordinary, worshipping the mind of God in daily life, and accepting gratefully the least commandment of His love.

The Roman Empire in the second century was, like our own, a century of reaction from the materialism which had dominated the first

century. This reaction brought, as ours has brought, strange and wild beliefs. Oriental magic and astrology flourished as Theosophy, Christian Science, and curious modern cults flourish in our own time, on the rebound from the materialism of the Victorian era.

In no age has there been a dearth of prodigals to arise, declaring themselves to be reactionaries from the stagnation of dogma and traditional Christianity, in spite of the fact that in a decade or less, the enthusiasms of these men have staled, and the world has turned away to listen to their successor with his newer reaction; while the Catholic Church has lived on with her perennial, imperceptible development like a great tree. Yet the world never fails to greet the appearance of each group of reactionaries as the dawn of a new spiritual era of freedom and vision. History is the best witness to the untruth of the idea, that such a time of fairly widespread reaction will bring forth new mystics. Mrs. Herman, in her book on *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, which is in some ways admirable and suggestive, says: "A revival of mystical religion was hoped for as a result of the general reaction from ecclesiastical authority and traditional theology (in the last few years). But up

to the present these expectations have not been realised." Why on earth should they? When was true mysticism divorced from authority and theology? And how large a volume would a Protestant writer on mysticism need, if he excluded Catholic mysticism which postulates these two things? Catholic mysticism is essentially supernatural: the mystical life is the gift of God. One does not find what is called "a natural mystic" . . . reaching the heights or displaying the energy of love which the Catholic mystics reached and displayed? The nourishment necessary to the mystical life is wanting or insufficient, and growth is stunted, and the mystical energy dwindles away, or is exhausted. Such a man often becomes wrong-headed, because he lacks the great good sense that comes from seeing creation wholly from the standpoint of a complete and undivided revelation, or else he is likely to go astray morally, as he wanders restlessly in search of something to satisfy the cravings of his spiritual nature. No, again we must realise in the biographies of such men, and in the history of such times of reaction, that it is impossible to speculate in spiritual matters, from the first essentials to the Four Last Things, without *first principles*. A'

mysticism of open questions is a mysticism of closed affections, arrested energies, and dangerous possibilities. As Russell Lowell said :
“ We need that anchored clinging to fixed principles, which knows how to swing with the tide without being carried away with it.”
There is only one angle at which a man may safely stand. All the great Catholic mystics have been among the most faithful children of the Church. They were not cribbed, cabined, and confined, because they believed in an Infallible Authority and a Divine Revelation. They could safely examine any new treasures open before them, with the dawn of revelation upon their eyes. They could have a free, because they had a fixed heart.

Because mysticism at its best is so spiritual and so good, at its worst it is bad ; for the prostitution of the best is always the worst. Without dogma, mysticism is a heavenly story with no earthly meaning. Wherever there is a departure from authority, any imaginable error may creep in, without prejudice to what is true under authority. As Mr. Chesterton says : “ All forgeries draw their significance from a signature.”

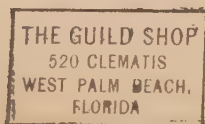
On the other hand, what is true belongs to

the kingdom of truth. Catholicism fulfils, it does not destroy ; rather it transforms and unifies. " Whatever is true, by whomsoever it is spoken, proceeds from the Holy Ghost," says St. Augustine, one of the greatest doctors of the Church ; and it was he who took Plato's *Republic* and made of it *The City of God*, as, centuries later, another great doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, took practically the whole of the philosophy of Aristotle, and transformed it into the working philosophy of the Church. Similarity is not identity, as any Catholic knows who has been in an Anglo-Catholic church. A Catholic mystic can perceive the difference between what looks the same, and what is the same. Nearly every thinker, some time or other, discovers a bit of the truth ; but he cannot discover any truth that is not in Him who is the Truth. He may put this single truth of his vividly and freshly and therefore be worth reading, but it takes discretion to discern where the single truth leaves off shining and the rushlights of his opinions begin to flicker and dazzle. Men rarely, if ever, love untruth, but, like trippers who root up wild flowers in some hope of possessing them, they find when they get home that the flower has become a very different thing

in their grasp to what it was in its natural surroundings. Withered truths are truths no longer. The chilling doctrines of Jansenism were the withered truths which live in the glorious gesture of the Seraphim who veil their faces saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts!" Even the sickly reek of Baudelaire comes from the distorted, isolated, broken-off, faded truth which has made for the perfection of so many saints—that life is a pageant of present moments which will never return, and of which we must make the best before they pass. Rotten lilies smell the worst. But our Truth is One over Whom death had no dominion; Christ is the whole Truth, and it is He Whom the Catholic mystics seek, find, and possess.

I have pointed out what I think are the chief religious and occult ideas which are likely to be taken for mysticism. There remains one other thing that is likely to give a false impression of mysticism, and that is certain books about mysticism as compared with the writings of the mystics themselves.

Simplicity is a divine quality, and complexity is human. Where the knowledge of the mystics is divine in its simplicity, the description by the mystic's biographer will often lend it a very



human complexity. The mystic way is simple and straight, but the guide-books to it are often weighted down with learning. This may deter the would-be student of mysticism, but it need not deter the would-be mystic.

“Sometimes,” writes little St. Thérèse of Lisieux, “when I read books in which perfection is put before us with the goal obstructed by a thousand obstacles, my poor little head is quickly fatigued. I close the learned treatise which tires my brain and dries up my heart, and I turn to the Sacred Scriptures. Then all becomes clear and lightsome—a single word opens out infinite vistas, perfection appears easy, and I see that it is enough to acknowledge our nothingness and, like children, surrender ourselves into the Arms of the good God. *Leaving to great and lofty minds the beautiful books which I cannot understand, still less put into practice, I rejoice in my littleness because only little children and those who are like them shall be admitted into the Heavenly Banquet. Fortunately ‘there are many mansions in my Father’s House’—if there were only those—to me—incomprehensible mansions with their baffling roads, I should certainly never enter there. . . .*”

No one is better fitted than that little saint to have the last word of this lecture. *The way to learn what mysticism is, is to imitate the spirit of the mystics, not to read all the latest books about mysticism.* And with the writings of the mystics, so attractive in their simplicity, we must not neglect the source from which they drew their own food for devotion, the Holy Gospels, the Psalms, the Holy Bible. In regard to some books about mysticism, we shall find ourselves in agreement with the negro preacher who was given a commentary on the Bible, and was subsequently asked what he thought of it. His answer was : “The Bible sure do throw a lot of light on it.”

Christianity, as Patmore says, is an experimental science. The same might be said of mysticism. The answer to all queries about it really is : “Try it.” Look up at the great Catholic mystics, the strong, courageous children of the heroic ages of faith, and the dark ages of doubt, and consider their ways. In spite of all its limitations, the Catholic Church has given mysticism her imprimatur. Père Poulain says : “The experiences of those who have climbed the highest peaks of perfection, their successes, even their mistakes, cannot fail to be useful, even to

those still stumbling on its lower slopes, or only gazing wistfully upwards from its base." These people lived in eternity, and attacked the darkness of their times, which receded before them. The mystical life is not descriptive nor speculative, it is a living science. The higher the message, the higher the medium through which it must come—art through colour and form, the message of music through sound and rhythm, but the divine message of the relation of God to man, must come through God Himself.

True mysticism will deliver us from a false relation to this world, and enable us to realise, that our lives are ideally, and potentially, hid with Christ in God.

CATHOLIC MYSTICISM : WHAT IT IS

CATHOLIC mysticism at its highest and best is *the apotheosis of the spiritual life*. It is the story of God sought, found, and experienced by the human soul. The miracle of mysticism is this : that the mystics, born in different centuries, in many lands, with varying temperaments, report essentially the same spiritual experience.

All earnest souls have ever been in quest of what the mystics claim to have found, namely *Truth*, a word which is loosely used, but beyond which there is nothing, outside of which there is nothing. Truth is the vital principle of life in a thing. The essential truth about a seed is its principle of life ; not what is incidental or accidental, but what is essential. The intellectually highest is always the morally truest, because God does not contradict Himself. The foundation of truth is in the nature of things. Its voice is in the harmony of things. But its home is in the bosom of God, and its manifestation in the Incarnate Word. It is the

innermost secret of the all-breathing universe. It is the inward glory of the Eternal. "For this was I born," said Jesus, "and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth." "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Our Blessed Lord was the only one among Time's millions who dared to call Himself not a truth, but the Truth. The mystics declare, with ecstatic delight, that they have come into experimental contact with *the Truth*. They alone, of all mankind, declare that they have found a satisfaction for all the deepest demands of their being, a satisfaction never failing, ever growing, and never becoming, even for one moment, satiety. One half of their satisfaction comes from being at peace with themselves. Says Father Martindale: "To live is to be: untruth is unreality: hence to live fully is to be truly one's self. Hence Life is Truth." Their humility and simplicity, learnt laboriously in the purgative way, and grown into gracefully and unconsciously by contact with God in the illuminative and unitive ways, has given them this vital truthfulness, this true life. Peace comes from simplicity. It comes

from knowing one's own frailties, from knowing what one wants, and from knowing God well enough to trust Him both with the frailties and the needs. And the other half of the mystic's satisfaction comes from his having a knowledge of God which satisfies him infinitely. He knows God, as Isaiah knew Him, to be an infinitely *reasonable* Master, to be the most delightful of friends, and to be that Tremendous Lover who alone can fill the wide heart of the little creature, man. "Man is full of wants, and he only loves those who can satisfy them all," said the restless Blaise Pascal, who knew the hunger of his own personality, and who came to know the true satisfaction for them in mystical experience.

This is the further claim to our attention : the fact that what the mystic claims to possess is not only a theory, but an experience. He does not say, "I submit." He says, "I have seen." Not "I have theorised," but "I have lived." And this experience, in the highest instances, has been on the highest possible plane short of the Beatific Vision—an experience and a life concerned not with time, but with eternity, not with the perishable, but the imperishable, not the external and the passing, but the inner, the utter, and the whole.

Surely, even as an ideal, this provides an answer to the question of the most ambitious soul, who asks something to live for. Wherever the mystic goes, he finds the Incarnate Word of God. His quest is not abstract, but towards a Divine Personality, who desires to be sought, found, worshipped, and loved. If the master-forces of life are personal, as they are, then what is the nature of the force represented by the Personality of the Master Whom to see is to love, and Whom to know is life eternal, Who came and comes to verify His own implanted instinct, to cancel what stands between us and Himself, and to impress upon the humble soul the image of God. The mystic seeks the most intimate union with Christ at His invitation, by His grace.

Whatever may be our opinion of the value of their testimony, the majesty of this claim, or the bare hope that it may be true, should incline us to give them at least the attention we give to experts in the smaller things of this world.

One realises how difficult it is to define mysticism in any adequate sense—

“For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within.”

We all know the inadequacy of words in regard to the sacrosanctity of the tenderest human relationships. What then can we say about the spiritual experiences of those aristocrats of God, drawn from all countries and classes of human life, who have experienced the best and the most that God can give them while in the body pent ?

Catholic students of mysticism have given a variety of definitions, but they all say much about the same thing. Father Hugh Pope, O.P., says : " Catholic mysticism is union with God, based essentially on prayer and contemplation." Cardinal Wiseman says it is " the science of love." In the Catholic Church, the words used until comparatively recent times were not *mysticism and the mystical life, but contemplation and the contemplative life*. The word mystic comes to us from the Greek mysteries. In the sense in which we use it to-day, the word first appeared in the writings of an unknown writer in the latter half of the fifth century, but it did not come into common use among spiritual writers until the last few hundred years. St. Augustine and St. Bernard always use this word : contemplation.

I believe we may be helped by much we cannot understand, for is not this one of the great and

unchanging methods of education, giving children pictures at which they may look again and again and so develop their minds ? Is not the test of a great picture its power to lift us to something we cannot reach without it ? Therefore, I believe it will be well for us to meditate upon the experiences of a few of the mystics at their highest, as expressed in their own words, even though we have to come gradually down into the valley from whence they started, whence, mayhap, we, by the mercy of God, shall be inspired to set out also.

St. Augustine's experience he describes in the words : " My mind in the flash of a trembling glance came to Absolute Being—That Which Is," which must mean a conscious contact with a Reality which is God, and an intellectual intuition of Him, leading as it did to a forsaking of all from which Augustine had hitherto striven in vain to free himself, and to an increase of all his powers of mind and soul in a union, which we may well suppose was at once a foretaste and an earnest of the bliss of heaven.

This is the touchstone of true mystical experience : its fruitfulness. " Love cannot be idle," says Ruysbroeck, and God never enters the human heart without accomplishing some-

thing there. Always He brings peace, and with peace, humility and distaste of all that is less than Himself. Beware of all spiritual experiences which create a sense of excitement or mere quiescence, for God creates neither of these. Nor does He merely fill the head with a great many fine ideas. His gift to the mind is part of His gift to the heart, a single peace from which root-thoughts may flower as naturally as buds open in a garden.

Ruysbroeck, in the fourteenth century, describes mystical experience in the following words : " God through the Holy Ghost inclines Himself towards us, and thereby we are touched by love. And our spirit by God's working and the power of love presses and inclines itself into God, and thereby God is touched. These two spirits, that is our own spirit and the Spirit of God, sparkle and shine one into the other, and each shows to the other its face. This makes each of the spirits yearn for the other in love. Each demands of the other all that it is, and each offers to the other all that it is, and invites it to all that it is." This I regard as one of the finest descriptions of mysticism existing.

Louis of Blois, in the sixteenth century, said : " The soul is transformed and changed into Him

as iron placed in the fire is changed into fire without ceasing to be iron.” And here he was speaking of union—the height of mystical experience. Note the difference between this and the goal of the false mystic—an “absorption into the All.” Individuality and personality, which means, of course, conscious personality, are always retained. Any immortality, any experience, which destroys personality has no meaning. Nirvana, to all intents and purposes, leads to nothing. In like manner, any mysticism which teaches the annihilation of individuality is not truth, and is not Catholic, and any leaning towards this, any taint of it, in the writings of a mystic ought to be enough to make one read him with suspicion.

I have mentioned Blaise Pascal, the restless man of ideas, who died in 1662. After his death a little paper was found sewn up in his doublet, which proved to be a memento of the great experience of his life :

The year of grace 1654.

Monday, 23rd of November, Feast of St. Clement, Pope
and Martyr, and of others in the martyrology,
Vigil of St. Chrysogonus, Martyr, and others,
from about half-past ten in the evening until about
half-past midnight.

FIRE.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,

Not of the philosophers and the savants.

Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

Forgetfulness of the world and everything under God.

The world has not known Thee, but I have known Thee.

Joy ! Joy ! Joy ! Tears of Joy !

My God, are You going to leave me ? Let me not be separated from You for ever.

Renunciation, total and sweet.

Abbot Butler says : “ Of all the attempts to describe such experiences, these barely articulate, incoherent exclamations of Pascal, the intellectual, the philosopher, the master of language and style, are for me beyond all compare the most eloquent and the most realistic.”

The French Jesuit and authority on mysticism, Père Poulain, defines mysticism as : “ The experimental perception of the science of God in the soul.”

The English Benedictine, lately dead, Dom Savinien Louismet of Buckfast, defines it as : “ Actually and perseveringly adhering and clinging to God, turning to Him constantly, finding delight in Him, making this the one supreme and sole business on earth.” In *Rod, Root and Flower*, Coventry Patmore says : “ That what the world, which truly knows

nothing, calls mysticism, is the science of ultimates."

To quote Père Poulain once more : " Ordinary prayer may be compared to the atmosphere that surrounds our globe. The birds move about in it *at will*. Thanks to its aid, they can rise above the earth, and they mount higher in proportion to the strength of their wing-beats. But this atmosphere has its limits. Above lie vast expanses that stretch away to the stars, and beyond. Try as they may, they cannot penetrate thither, *even by redoubling their efforts*. The eagle is as powerless as the rest. God alone can transport them to this region. Were He to do so, they would lie passive in His hand, there would be no further need to use their wings. They would have to discard their former methods of operation, and adopt new ones. This upper region where the wing no longer has any power is a figure of the mystic state. It resembles it also by its peace, its silence. Far from the turmoil of earth, we enter into a space empty of all created things. God dwells there alone."

" God dwells in a secret and hidden way in all souls, in their very substance," declares St. John of the Cross, " for if He did not, they

could not exist at all. This dwelling of God is very different in different souls. In some He dwells contented, in others displeased, in some as in His own house, giving His orders and ruling it, in others as a stranger in a house not his own, where He is not permitted to command or to do anything at all."

St. Gregory says: "The mind must clear itself of all sense perceptions, and of all images of things bodily and spiritual, so that it may be able to find and consider itself as it is in itself, that is, its essence, and then, by means of this realisation of itself, thus stript of all, it rises to the contemplation of God."

This union passes above the understanding in that supreme portion of the spirit which is visible to God alone and which He alone can inhabit, which is called variously by different authors, the summit of the mind, the centre of the spirit, the essence of the soul.

Concerning this "essence of the soul" Ven. Blosius observes in *The Book of Spiritual Instruction*. "Few rise above their natural powers; few ever come to know the apex of the spirit, and the hidden fund or depth of the soul. . . . Blessed is he who, even after many years of continual labour and constant

digging, at last deserves to find the spring of living waters in the secret essence of his soul. . . . May God, the uncreated Abyss, deign to call to Himself our spirit, the created abyss, and to unite it to Himself, in order that our soul, absorbed into the most deep sea of the Godhead, may happily lose itself in the Spirit of God. In this union the object and end of all spiritual exercises of all the sacred writings and of all instructions will be reached and obtained."

We may fairly summarise these definitions by the mystics themselves by saying, that a Catholic mystic is an experimentalist of religion, and that his essential characteristic is a conscious touch of God.

Any man well remembers his initial introduction to what is called cosmic consciousness, in the realisation that he is not alone, but part of the worlds of matter, energy, mind, and spirit. And to all souls, who wake up to this consciousness, such a moment puts into their hands a key which will unlock for them strange doors. Thank God, as Father Ronald Knox points out, in Catholicism, fantastic speculations which are likely to come to the imaginative mind thus awakened, are "restrained and redirected." We

could have nothing approaching the fantastic vagaries of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Joanna Southcott in Catholic mysticism, which can never be divorced from ethics or dogma, nor hindered with unnecessary considerations about the dimensions and population of the angelic or satanic spheres, or the future fate of the world. The business of the Catholic mystic is to live his own life, and to "mind his own business," which latter was the phrase of the old English mystics for meditation and contemplation. Man has one life to live, one vocation to follow, one subject for speculation, namely, how best to fulfil his duty to God and his neighbour. Vast speculations about starry possibilities will only turn his head and make him stagger in the narrow way—will make him a village idiot of the occult, rather than a mystic in the true and catholic sense of the word.

Now we come to the question that naturally rises to the lips of those who discover the existence, by hearsay, of the mystical life : Can anyone become a mystic ? Is it esoteric ? Has it to do with a small coterie of superior people, or may any child of the Church aspire to its privileges ?

Coventry Patmore says : " Genius is nothing

but great good sense, or real apprehension, exercised upon objects more or less out of common sight, and the chief ingredient of even the highest and most heroic sanctity is the same apprehension, taking hold upon spiritual truths and applying them to the conduct of the interior, as well as the exterior life." This may be true, but a genius is nevertheless rare. The door is open to the human race, but few enter therein. Abbot Butler says : " The standard teaching of the Catholic ages down to modern times, is that contemplation is the natural term of a spiritual life seriously lived, and is a thing to be desired, aspired to, aimed at, and not infrequently achieved, by devout souls." St. Augustine and St. Gregory say in more than one place that contemplation is open to all. Thomas of Valgornera says : " All are called to perfect virtue, why not to a perfect form of prayer ? " " Remember," says St. Teresa, " Our Lord invited ' any man.' He is Truth itself. His word cannot be doubted. If *all* had not been included, He would not have addressed everybody, nor would He have said : ' I will give you to drink.' He might have said : ' Let all men come, for they will lose nothing by it, and I will give drink to those I think fit for it.' But

as He said unconditionally : ‘ If *any* man thirst, let him come to me,’ I feel sure that, unless they stop half-way, none will fail to drink of this living water. May Our Lord, Who has promised to grant it, give us grace to seek it as we ought for His own sake.”

In parenthesis, one would say, that if you want the best that God can give you, your prayer is born in heaven and not on earth. If the desire is in your heart, the answer is in His, because He put the desire there.

If our object is the highest God can give us, as an end—namely, being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect—why may not this most effectual means be possible to us ? Yet it is necessary to tell oneself, that, if the cultivation of the body for athletics demands discipline, and scholarship involves scorning delights and living laborious days, the cultivation of the finest faculties of the soul *in preparation* for God’s greatest gifts, requires more attention and concentrated purpose. This is the real crux of the matter, the reason why mystics are few. Few are prepared to pay the price, few can face separation from the perishable. “Few,” says St. John of the Cross, “are prepared to make the ascent of Mount Carmel.”

On the other hand, we must never forget that in such an attempt the very deepest part of our nature is not on the side of our pleasure-loving senses, pulling in the direction of ease and comfort, but on the side of our good angels, our ideals, on the side of God. We all want to know God more widely than we imagine. More widely than superficial people think, is there a human quest to establish relations with the Supreme Being. Man is made for God, and so the most fundamental law of gravitation in his being is towards God. The trouble is, in his fallen nature, there are always the cross-currents of impatient selfishness, demanding ease and satisfaction here and in this world. But still that primary and more ancient demand cannot be entirely shouted down—the desire to ally our destiny with supernatural power, to have some part and fellowship with the eternally victorious forces of God. Some men seem more haunted by God than others. The question of St. Thomas Aquinas in his youth was: “What is God in His true self?” He has answered that in the *Summa* more completely perhaps than anybody else outside of the Bible, with knowledge gained from his ceaseless contemplation, rising above the best and most acute

effort of his reason. In our worship at the shrine of the superb intellect of St. Thomas we are apt to overlook the fact that he was one of the greatest contemplatives.

The following is a quotation from the *Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, by Peter Calo : “ . . . After the death of the Doctor, Brother Reginald, having returned to Naples and resumed his lectures, exclaimed with many tears : ‘ My brothers, while he was still in life, my Master forbade me to disclose the admirable things concerning him whereof I had been a witness. One of these was that he had acquired his science not by human industry, but by the merit of prayer, for whenever he wished to study, discuss, read, write, or dictate, he first had recourse to prayer in private, and poured forth his soul with tears in order to discover the divine secrets, and by the merits of this prayer, his doubts were removed, and he issued therefrom fully instructed. . . . ’ ”

Men have rightly sought to know God by reason, to think God’s thoughts after Him ; but they come to the end of what reason can do in its advance to what is beyond reason. The greatest acts are performed, not because they are rational, though they are not irrational ;

they are super-rational. Why did you do that ? Because I loved. Because I believed.

By faith, the thing you hold, holds you. But men know God best by experimental love, as does the child its mother. All the great mystics have written about the knowledge of God through experimental love, notably St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, St. Bernard on the *Canticles*, St. John of the Cross in *The Living Flame of Love*. Walter Hilton, our English mystic, says : " Perfect love maketh God and the soul to be as if they were one thing." And St. Bernard : " This is the power of love, that it maketh thee to be like unto that which thou lovest."

It may be that God is calling you to the mystical life. Before the showers of grace, there may be a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, such as an interest in mystical books or the Lives of the Saints, or an almost physical difficulty in leaving the Blessed Sacrament. A hunger and a thirst after God is an earnest that you will be filled. Humility is a foundation virtue, but to say : " God is not calling *me*," is not humility, and may be rebellion. How do you know ? God calls and chooses whom He will, sage or servant, prince or pauper. A few men will always lead

the world intellectually, but no man has a monopoly of sanctity. See for yourself, from the lives of the mystics, what varying temperaments, circumstances, heredity, natural gifts, they had. Brother Lawrence, whose few words on the *Practice of the Presence of God* are famous, was at first a stupid sort of fellow, a clumsy footman, and later cook in a Carmelite monastery. St. Teresa, on the other hand, had the mind of a statesman. Blessed Richard Rolle was almost more like a musical instrument than merely a musician, so full of music and thoughts of music was his whole personality ; while Blessed Bernadette, to whom Our Lady revealed herself at Lourdes, was so ignorant and simple that when she became a nun it was best to put her in the kitchen to peel potatoes ; yet her few private notes on the spiritual life reveal a wisdom that any man might envy.

It may be that God has called you before, and your heart aches for the vision on which you turn your back.

“ There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore.
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen, I now can see no more."

WORDSWORTH.

That may be what you feel, as in pensive reverie you stand amidst the broken idols for which you sacrificed the highest thing. But God is calling yet. Alexander conquered the world, and wept because there was no more to conquer. But this did not give him peace. Napoleon said : " The happiest day of my life was the day of my first Communion." The alphabet of the spiritual life tells more than the speech of the world. The world, as A. C. Benson observes, mistakes "money for wealth, excitement for pleasure, interference for influence, fame for wisdom, speed for progress, and volubility for eloquence." What matters is God and you. Your life is never safe nor serene until it is hid with Christ in God. Contemplation is a gift of God, given to whom He pleases. It will not *infallibly* result from any preparation we may make, and cannot be merited. Yet it pre-supposes preparation, and it is our duty to make preparation for the best things God can do to us, in us, and through us. This preparation is best made by

attention to the life-duties done with a single eye to God's glory, by the charity which begins at home, in one's circle and circumstances. Secondly, this preparation is made by mental prayer, which the devil will try all ways to make you give up, or at least slacken for some excuse or other, as he did St. Teresa. And thirdly, you can make this preparation by conformity in all things to the will of God, by bearing your own cross unquestioningly, by moving at the dictates of the bidding of the Invisible, with a consequent untrammelled freedom in regard to the things of time and sense.

The great Catholic mystics have always spoken of the mystic way as being, with minor variations, threefold : purgative, illuminative, and unitive.

The purgative way is not hard to understand, but hard to follow ; or rather, hard to face, but, once faced, easy to follow if we expect the Lord, do manfully, and comfort our hearts with confidence in Him. There is, of course, no way but the way of the Cross. Self must be denied in every aspect, mastered in every department, and wholly mortified. St. Augustine says in his *Confessions* : " When first I knew Thee, Thou didst take hold of me that I might see

there was something to see, but that I was not yet such as to see it." He had not yet arrived at that purity of heart, that singleness of sight, that intent looking at God's point of view by which one is permitted to see, in some wise, God Himself. The knowledge of God comes through purification. To know God with the reason, we must have the mind of Christ. That means a deliberate re-educating of our outlook on life, that this mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus. Every beat of the heart must be brought into tune with His will—a not impossible, but a curiously swift task for love. We read in Dante, that the first terrace of the Mount of Purgatory is devoted to the cleansing of pride and the production of humility: that means the establishing of right proportions in a man's mind concerning the importance of God, and the importance of himself. All the mystics have, in varying kind and degree, sought mortification. Sorrow is always influence, pain is always power, if it is accepted sorrow and accepted pain. "Let me suffer or die," says St. Teresa. Mother Juliana of Norwich talked of being "in penance until the time that we be led so deep into God that we verily and truly know our own soul." That is no bugle-call to every

beginner to fashion for himself a discipline without delay, and to fast relentlessly, but it is a bugle-call to him to begin a patient hedging and ditching round his character, to prune inclinations that are running to seed, to cut off thorny points in his temper, to deal with natural impatience, an undisciplined tongue, a lazy mind, and other characteristics which need attention. We must be free of every attachment that is outside the circle of His will and that does not lead to Him. Once the rankest weeds are cut down, patient daily weeding will do the rest, and it will indeed need to be patient. We must often be content with one virtue—contrition based on faith and hope and love—for some of our most treasured virtues will seem to fail, our good temper be ruffled by trials, our strong hope crushed by failures. But, says Ruysbroeck, one of the very greatest of the mystics, “He only is a contemplative who is the slave of nothing, not even of his virtues.” Humility flourishes when all else fails, and will restore all other virtues *in Christ*.

Whatever death one may die in regard to self, one loses nothing and gains much. There is always, as Tauler says, a joyful life

corresponding to each death. It is useless to consider the possibility of high mystical experience without the crucifixion of the flesh. "Delicate living and the spirit of prayer do not agree," said St. Teresa. We must choose between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. In the last analysis, a man worships at the shrine of Apollo, or at the foot of the Crucifix. If we survey the whole of life, we realise that purgation is no arbitrary principle of the spiritual life ; all training, physical, mental, or spiritual, means the assertion of something and the putting aside of something else. C. G. Montefiore tells this story of Watts, the painter : "When quite a young man," he says, "Watts found it desirable for the purposes of his art to get up at sunrise. To enable and school himself to rise readily at these early and changing hours, he slept for a long time on the floor, in order that he might waken and arouse himself at the right hour without difficulty. This was true asceticism. It was a hard discipline undertaken, not for itself, but for an ideal and a wholly different end. Directly the habit had been achieved, the mere means and method could be abandoned. So may we say of all bodily enjoyments, or, indeed, of all enjoyments whatever. So far as

they are wholly without evil results for the mind and soul, they are not only not wrong, but they are positively right. But directly they make us less good at our work, think less clearly, act less morally, diminish our output of good, they are for *us*, whatever they may be for others, illicit and immoral." If Watts did this for a corruptible crown, what shall we do for an incorruptible? The Christian mystics have been heroes, and we must allow them to remake us on their heroic plan of generosity and faith. "If any man will come after Me," says Our Lord, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." If you will be perfect you must, in some sense, sell all that you have. When Our Lord bade the rich young ruler: "Go sell what thou hast and give to the poor," I do not think He was thinking so much of the poor as of the rich young ruler. We must clasp with increasing tenacity the Hand that was pierced that we may be led to the heights, and with an ever-loosening grasp we must drop the other things of the world. Our Lord Himself taught us that there must be no compromise in regard to anything that offends or disturbs the spiritual

life. "If thy right hand scandalise thee, cut it off."

It is a fact that the dawn of the mystical life often follows a night of humiliation ; that God leads us through darkness to light, through pain to spiritual joy. He has to make the vessel sound before He puts a precious substance into it. "No one," says St. Francis of Assisi, "should esteem himself to be a servant of God until he has passed through temptation and trial. A temptation overcome is in some sort a nuptial ring by which Our Lord unites Himself to the souls of His servants."

From this, which is the united opinion and teaching of the Catholic mystics, it may be seen that between true Mysticism and occult dabblings in the unseen, there is this great gulf of the purgative way fixed. The would-be mystic who only wants to see and know for selfish reasons can never pass across it. But it must never be forgotten that to those who look across this gulf with longing eyes, trembling because they know their own fear and frailty, Mother Church, who is none other than Whom Juliana of Norwich calls "Our Mother Jesus," says : "He that is a little one, let him come to me," and, in the words of Isaias : "O poor little

one, tossed with tempest and without all comfort, behold I will lay thy stones in order, and will lay thy foundations with sapphires."

I do not propose, in these lectures, to use the ordinary phraseology of Mysticism. You will find in mystical books much about the Prayer of Quiet, Recollection, Introversion, and Ecstasy. I would rather put before you in everyday language the well-known essentials.

There can be no hard and fast boundary lines between the three "ways" of the mystical life. At any time the seeking soul may have a taste of all three.

Illumination is simply the light which God gives, in which we may *see* things in their relation to Himself, where hitherto we have only believed them with His previous grace of *faith*. It is given only to those who have first believed on His word alone, but to such it is given irrespective of great or little natural intelligence. It is a power of seeing which we cannot attain to by ourselves, no matter how we strive; but God does not refuse it to those who humbly prepare themselves for it—who want it enough, patiently enough.

Meditation—the daily loving consideration of

some one of the mysteries of the life of Our Lord, as a mother gazes tirelessly at her little child with her heart in her eyes, loving every word and every gesture—that is the true school of illumination. “My meditation was also an unfolding, a developing of my interior being under the radiant light of grace,” wrote Dom Verkade, a Benedictine monk and a great painter. Looking, longing, loving, we grow like. Meditation should be more a work of the heart than of the head. We should, to use Joubert’s phrase, take our definite subject for meditation, picture it as clearly as we can with the artist-faculty of the imagination, and then “brood over it until it shines.” And when it shines, we can spend the rest of our meditation-time loving it, impressing it on our memory and on our heart. Have you not half an hour a day that you could give to meditation? If you would live the contemplative life, you must have that at least. Sometimes distractions may make it tiresome, but let them go by like a noisy crowd outside the city walls. It will come to be to you a haven of refuge in the day. It is only the shallow spiritual enthusiasts who are impatient of this daily, careful, pondered, thought-out, and then loved meditation. Only after years

of contemplative life is it likely to be good for a person living in the world to put aside meditation on the life of Our Lord in all its details, for a prayer of union with God, without a subject for ordinary thought. Baron von Hugel, an authority on mysticism, who was also a man much given to prayer and the interior life, mentions in his *Life of Prayer*, that he practised this daily thought-out meditation for twenty-five years, before exchanging it for a more purely contemplative prayer, at the advice of his director.

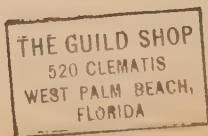
It is in meditation that "the picture of meditation becomes the window of recollection." We must *practise* in this way, and continue at all times to practise, the presence of God. We must get to know what manner of Man our Lord is, and then, out of the time of meditation, visualise Him as always with us. This practice will probably bring greater spiritual development than anything else, and often leads, after a concentration of reason, feeling and will upon God and the things of God, to an illuminated consciousness wherein all things are lit up in the uncreated light. *And when the soul comes into conscious relation with God, with a presence, a peace, a nourishment, a quiet, a calm, a perfect*

understanding that she perhaps bewilderedly realises must be God, for it can be none other, then let her still the thoughts of her mind and the movements of human wonder, and be still and know that He is God.

From this moment the prayer is set free from the limitations of *time*.

“He needs not time for His teachings; by whatever means He chooses, so soon as He has touched the soul He has taught it, and His mere touch is His teaching,” says Tauler.

Stillness of soul is an indispensable preliminary to the receptivity and the touch of God. The symbol for all time of that stillness is the Annunciation, where in the ever-blessed Mary, Virgin of Virgins, there was no obstacle to the coming of God. Stillness does not mean the absence of trouble, but the absence of undedicated trouble. We may not know *how* God is coming to the rescue, to supply our need, any more than Our Lady may have known how He would explain to St. Joseph what Child it was she had conceived; but we must know that it is God who will deal with the matter. “I know in whom I have believed.” “It is the Lord.” The very words hush the soul.



“ Once in a silent night a child was born
Who brought again what once was lost and torn.
Could but thy soul, O man, become a silent night,
Christ would be born in thee, and set all things to
right.”

To know, you must be still. Not tense, but the soul on tiptoe. What He says when He comes is so much more important than what we have to say to Him. Surface consciousness in regard to surface things must be suspended. Says St. Thomas, “ Meditation is the soul looking out in quest of truth. Contemplation is the soul’s clear, free, and attentive dwelling on the truth to be perceived.” St. Bernard says : “ The grace of contemplation is granted only in response to a longing and importunate desire. It is the sleep of the soul in the arms of God, but it is a deep sleep, alive and watchful, which enlivens the inward senses.” “ It is,” he says, “ not a conception, but a perception.”

Effort ceases, except the almost instinctive care to prevent distractions from taking the attention. *In one moment* of this quiet consciousness of God present, intent on her and active within her, the soul is well rewarded for her patient hours of meditation, for her self-discipline, and for her obedient acceptance of

all the trials and troubles of life. Recollection, which previously has been voluntary and attained with care, now becomes as involuntary and easy as walking, reading, or playing the violin can become. Whatever is done that is worth doing, is at last done easily. There is no effort present, but a great power, as there was when the stone was moved from the door of the Sepulchre. At first it was our voluntary effort; now it is God's given power. The truth, which has been sought so diligently and, when found, adhered to in bare faith, is now *perceived* as infinitely attractive and satisfying, so that it would be obvious madness to think otherwise. The moral law, which the soul has tried to realise in her own life, is perceived to be the first principle of happiness and spiritual liberty. Charity is no longer a Christian duty, but the truest self-expression.

With regard to the relation of active charity to contemplative prayer, I know of no better epitome of this than one I have found in the third volume of some meditations called *Prayer for all Times*, by a modern French Jesuit, Père Pierre Charles. He says beautifully, that after the Ascension, Our Lord's *actions* were continued in His Apostles. He left them power to remit

sins in His Name, to teach and to preach. His *Body and Blood* He left in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. One more part of His humanity He has left us. *He has left His human need in the person of His poor.* "All those who are suffering—apart from sin—are somewhat of Our Saviour," he says. And therefore, to the mystic, leaving contemplation for active charity, is only to leave meditation to minister to Him, to rise up from sitting at His feet and leaning on His Sacred Heart, to supply those things which, for our sakes, He deigns to need.

Thus we see that it is the whole of the mystic's schooling *to make himself supple to God*, to use the words of our own English mystic, Juliana of Norwich. This is absolute submission to Christ our King. There follows an entire absorption in the interests of God, a communion with His strength, since the mystic moves continuously at His dictates, with a consequent serenity and highest activity in the world for His glory. Thy will be *done*. This is the explanation of the activity of St. Joan, St. Bernard, St. Ignatius, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Teresa, St. Colette. It is the secret of the martyrs who "endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." The keynote of the mystical life is certainly joy. There is

always a wholesome horror of undue solemnity. However hard the life, it is always lived in a joyous spirit. Even in this world, as we enter into the spirit of Christ in other virtues, we must also enter into the joy of Our Lord.

Those who love Our Lord keep His words, and among these words they keep what He has said on the subject of anxious thoughts, worry, fears, and sadness. Confidence, as all the saints have declared, delights the heart of God. It does more : it keeps the mind warm and still, and in this mental atmosphere, the mystical consciousness can awaken.

All springs from this divine and most effectual touch on the soul, wherein she at last becomes *conscious* of what she has hitherto known only by faith—the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity ; for this is the recreating touch of the Creator, the healing and pardoning touch of the Redeemer, the inspiring touch of the Holy Ghost. What she could never have merited God has freely given—this mystical consciousness of the facts of faith.

As a human being is at his best in an atmosphere of sympathetic appreciation, so the soul flowers out in this consciousness of God's full and loving attention. Generosity is the

immediate result. Calmness, equability, confidence are other results. Hitherto the soul has acted out of a sense of obedience ; now she acts out of the impelling force of love. Now she avoids sin because she begins to *see* the horror of its essence, and for the same reason, she wastes less time than ever over regrets and repinings when, through frailty or inadvertence, she falls into some fault ; quickly she takes the unfailing pardon, rises up, and runs on in the way of perfection, doing penance by making progress, showing contrition by confidence.

As St. Augustine said : “ I entered into the secret closet of my soul, led by Thee, and this I could do because Thou wast my helper. I entered and beheld, with the mysterious eye of my soul, the light that never changes. Above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence, it was not the common light which all flesh can see, nor was it greater yet of the same kind, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter and to flood all space. It was different from all such things. Nor was it above my intelligence as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher because it made me, and I was lower because made by it. He who knoweth the truth, knoweth that light.

And who knoweth eternity? Love knoweth it."

Whereas hitherto the soul has lamented that faith alone has not been able to rouse in her a love for God as great as she wished, now she feels that she begins to give Him love for love. There is a great deal of difference in hearing that some one loves us, and has done much for us, and, in the presence of that person, knowing ourselves robed and crowned and enthroned by their love, knowing that our every movement is their delight, our every need a precious capacity for their desire to give. An uncouth man will be transformed by the dignity of a reciprocated love, and an ungracious woman become gentle, so the imperfect soul becomes perfect in will, if not at once in word and deed, by the divine gift of this mystical consciousness that she is loved of God.

The measure of the mystic's real progress is always the measure of his love, of his love for Love Crucified. Now, there stood at the Cross of Jesus His Mother, Rosa Mystica, St. John, the Apostle of Love, and Mary Magdalen, whose sins were forgiven because she loved much.

"The measure with which God should be loved is to love Him without measure," as St.

Bernard taught. This is the perfection with which Our Lord bids us be perfect. "When the evening of this life comes," says St. John of the Cross, "you will be judged on love."

In the illuminative way, the soul has come to an experimental knowledge of GOD'S love for her. Now in the unitive way, He causes her so to contemplate this Love, and so to desire to reciprocate it, that, possessed by it, her finite being is transfigured and transformed into His Likeness, and her love is divinely perfected and fulfilled. "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." "That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts: that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

This is the Mystical and Contemplative Life. It has been lived in the cloister and outside the cloister by thousands of men and women for nearly two thousand years. It is the life chosen by those who have preferred the eternal to

the temporal, the happy to the troublous, the peaceful to the restless, the heroic to the lazy and the miserable. The world is never tired of making criticisms of Christianity, and of writing the biographies of bad Popes and bad Catholics, but it has little to say about the vast number of saints and mystics who are known to history ; and there are a far vaster number who are unknown in this world, though they are glorious in heaven. Would to God we might be among them ! The wonderful thing is that if we are doing what God wants of us, we *are*. If we are happy in our drudgery, wholehearted in our sufferings, instant in prayer, full of quick and true pity for the suffering, then we have, as the canon of the Mass prays, “some part and fellowship with Thy apostles and martyrs.”

In this life we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers. The true conflict, the basic quarrel, is not between Church and State, but between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness. The forces of darkness are ceaselessly working among men to entice them to depression, sadness, cynicism, selfishness, pleasure, avarice, lust and despair. The cause of the trouble in Russia and Mexico is political, but not fundamentally, as a mystic

sees fundamental causes. The fundamental cause is the ancient hatred of Calvary, hatred of humility, of faith, of the Mass. Calvary is defended by a comparative handful of people who stand for the highest things. Martyrdom is never extinct, though it is rarer at some times than at others ; for the meaning of martyr is “ witness.” In this age it is not rare.

With the eyes of faith open we may see that they that are for us are more than they that are against us. The unseen forces know that the victory is a foregone conclusion — more, it is already won.

Had you the eyes of Argus, and the hands of Briareus, you could see nothing and do nothing without prayer. Nothing can take the place of prayer : nothing can be done without it. “ Man without prayer,” writes St. Philip Neri, “ is a dumb beast.” Father Faber says : “ Prayer is the grand difficulty, and other difficulties are solved with it. Now spiritual reading feeds and furnishes prayer. It supplies matter. It plants the wilderness. It irrigates what it has planted. The old masters call it oil for the lamp of prayer.” Therefore, read the lives of the great Catholic contemplatives ; you will discover principles and methods which shorten roads.

“ Thus saith thy Beloved : I am thy salvation, thy peace and thy life. Keep thyself with Me, and thou shalt find peace. Let the transitory pass, seek the eternal ” (Thomas à Kempis).

THE CONTEMPLATIVE IN THE CLOISTER

YEARS ago I used to spend much time in Westminster Abbey. It is impossible to think of it, alas, in these days as an Abbey. On state occasions, journalists refer to it as a "venerable edifice," "our national Valhalla," or "the English Pantheon." Whatever it is, there is abundant evidence as to what it was. In place of shrines to the heroes of Christ, there are shrines, in more or less good taste, to the heroes of English history and literature in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, men who wore the halo of success rather than that of sanctity. I do not know what has become of the emoluments bequeathed by Henry VII and others for requiem Masses. I do know that the people who built and endowed the Abbey, would be considerably astonished to find it the home of modern Anglicanism.

It was in the Abbey that I first meditated on that Catholic contemplation in which are the roots of whatever greatness our country ever had. Especially did I do so in the Chapel

of St. Faith, where, over the place where the altar stood, is to be seen an old painting, representing a tall figure of St. Faith above a small painting of the Crucifixion. A kneeling monk on one side holds an inscription which, translated, reads : " From the burden of my sore transgressions, sweet Virgin, deliver me ; make my peace with Christ and blot out mine offence." A tradition says that this chapel was the cell of the first anchorite in England, and the anchorites were men who dwelt alone with the Alone, precursors of the Contemplative Orders, spiritual children of Elias, St. John the Baptist, and St. Anthony the Great. They were men who despised the world, and were despised by the world, but who nevertheless lived and died in prayer for the world, of whom the world was not worthy. Just as the lights burning before the sacred pictures in the cells of holy hermits on dark headlands, and desert islands, were the first lighthouses, so has the light of contemplative prayer ever been the safety and salvation of men.

The deserts of Egypt and Syria were filled with hermits, during the ages of persecution under the Roman emperors. St. John Chrysostom and other fathers of the Church inform us

that the contemplative life entirely outweighed the active, the active religious life being a later development, born of the need of the times. It still holds good that any abiding success granted to religious activity depends very largely on the mortification, prayers, and vicarious suffering of unknown and silent contemplatives, who, in closest intimacy with God, removed from the distracting and disturbing world, are—in providing spiritual dynamics—the true utilitarians.

A monastery never was a popular institution with Protestants, and a contemplative monastery least of all. But is it not true that the nearer a principle or an institution is to the Heart of Our Divine Lord, the more unpopular it is in the world. It is a great privilege to champion an unpopular cause which you know to be true. Perhaps more wild fiction has been written about the history of the monasteries than about anything else. It is of course true that there have been, here and there, abuses, but in any age the standard of the monk and nun has at least been better than that of other people. The monastic life has done more for civilisation, in the best sense of that word, than all the governments and systems of life that accompanied it. The men who prayed and

fasted in quiet cloisters gave us the greater part of our best literature, the materials of history, and the secrets of art. M. de Montalembert tells us that "to the monks almost exclusively had men cause to be grateful for the blessings of a thorough education, from the ninth to the fourteenth century." Many of the greatest and noblest names in history are those of monks. Professor Hannah, a Protestant, says: "The very shortest list of the world's great statesmen must include the name of St. Benedict. He stands with Julius Cæsar as the chief moulder of one of the great civilisational organisations of past years. If we would see things in their true proportions, in the light of real historical perspective—religion wholly apart—it must appear that Hannibal or Napoleon, or even Alexander, left a smaller dent on the general story of mankind." "From his cell at Clairvaux, St. Bernard was ruling a continent." "He was, in the very truest sense, the mouthpiece of the ideal aspirations of the age in which he lived. His sermons and his letters are full of the superiority of the work of serving God in the cloister, to any other duty, the eternal song of monasticism. No better man ever trod this earth."

The monks garnered up the sacred oracles of

Christianity, laboured at scientific problems, developed poetry, painting, and music—in fact, all that provides a true foundation for human life and adorns it. We got our Bible from them, and our classics, and but for the vandalism of those who dispersed them, there would have been no lost *Decades* of Livy. Of their charity we know: “We owe the agricultural restoration of a great part of Europe to the monks” (according to Hallam, also a non-Catholic historian). Social life always centred round the monastery. For two centuries, nearly all the bishops of England were monks. From the sixth to the twelfth century, they were often the advisers of kings. Another non-Catholic historian says of the Benedictine rule: “Wherever it penetrated, it was the pioneer, not of Christianity only, but of civilisation and of all humanising influences.” “Monasticism in the West was the greatest single constructive force that existed in the world for one thousand years after the fall of Rome” (Professor Hannah). “To the spirit of the Catholic Church and to the monks of the Middle Ages, Europe is mainly indebted for her present civilisation” (Edmund Burke).

S. R. Maitland, still another Protestant

historian, speaks of monasteries as “ a quiet and religious refuge for helpless infancy and old age, a shelter of respectable sympathy for the orphan maiden and desolate widow, as central points whence agriculture was to spread over bleak hills and barren downs and marshy plains, and deal bread to millions perishing with hunger and its pestilential train, as repositories of the learning which then was, and well-springs of the learning which was to be, as nurseries of art and science, giving the stimulus, the means and the reward to invention, and aggregating round them every head that could devise, and every hand that could execute, as the nucleus of the city which in after days of pride should crown its palaces and bulwarks with the towering cross of its cathedral. This, I think, no man can deny.”

Therefore, to the man who asks for a *raison d'être* of the monasteries, there is an overwhelming answer, even from the point of view of the world which asks for utility in regard to material progress, and ignores or holds of no account the primary aim of the religious, which is, was, and ever will be, union with God.

But in England their homes were broken up and the monks dispersed without gratitude or mercy by the lust and greed of Henry VIII, who

certainly had no zeal for religion or morality at that time. Nobles, hungry for estates wrested from the Church, began a practice which is immortalised by the name of "praying for an estate." They used to kneel and specify what lands they wanted, bribing Thomas Cromwell. The evidence against the monasteries was from hired spies. The evidence *for* the monasteries was plain for every eye to see in the lovely spires and well-tended lands and contented labourers up and down the length and breadth of the country. But attacks on religion usually begin with an attack on the Religious Orders, and so, as Chesterton says in his poem on the "Secret People"—by which he means the ordinary working Englishmen :

" They burnt the homes of the shaven men, that had been
 quaint and kind,
 Till there was no bed in a monk's house, nor food that
 man could find.
 The inns of God where no man paid, that were the wall
 of the weak,
 The King's servants ate them all. And still we did not
 speak."

And again, with his usual vividness, Mr. Chesterton makes us see what really happened at the dissolution of the monasteries, in his book on Cobbett :

“ We should think it rather odd if a profiteer had a country - house that was called ‘ The Cathedral.’ We might think it strange if a stock-broker had built a villa, and habitually referred to it as a church. But we can hardly see the preposterous profanity by which one chance rich man after another has been able to commandeer or purchase a house which he still calls an Abbey. It is precisely as if he had gone to live in the parish church ; had breakfasted on the altar, and cleaned his teeth in the font. That is the short and sharp summary of what happened in English history.”

But crucify monasticism, and in three days it will rise again. The sun of monastic contemplation was darkened, only to be relit in unsetting glory, and the monks are coming again to bring England back to prayer and faith, and to the Church of prayer and faith. They are even imitated nowadays by that section of Protestantism calling itself Anglo-Catholic, but Protestant monasticism is an anaemic plant until it is transplanted, as thank God it often is, in true Catholic soil.

In this age of alleged utility, the most common question about the Contemplative Orders is : of what practical use are they, and what tangible,

visible good results from their existence? How can they benefit either their contemporaries or posterity in this age, when cities are established and learning has the universities for storehouses, and there are countless organisations for looking after the poor, and we have more churches and cathedrals than we can fill and shall not be wanting any more just now? We know there may be a case for the active orders who go out into the world, to preach, teach, nurse the sick, and so on. But these contemplatives do nothing that is of any practical use to the world of to-day. Are they not cowards, leaving life's warfare to others, and selfishly seeking a life of peace in the cloister? Such a mentality—and it is very common—betrays a woeful ignorance of what true activity involves, what is its essence. It is not fever, rush and bustle.

In his book, *The Light Invisible*, Monsignor Benson has a story called: "In the Convent Chapel," which describes, better than anything else I know, what I mean by the activity of the contemplative. Describing how a priest—who had no understanding of the contemplative life—visited the chapel of a convent and, seeing a nun praying before the altar, thought she would be better employed in active work in the world, he tells

how light came to the priest, and how he suddenly realised wherein the work of a contemplative lay.

“Think of it like this. Have you ever had to wait in a City office? If you have, you will know how intense quiet can exist with intense activity. There are quiet figures here and there round the room. Or it may be that there is only one such figure—a great financier—and he sitting there almost motionless. . . . Fortunes are made and lost at the gentle movements of this lonely quiet man in his office. Well, so it was here. I perceived that this black figure knelt at the centre of reality and force, and with the movement of her will and lips, controlled spiritual destinies for eternity. There ran out from this peaceful chapel lines of spiritual power. . . . I did not know whether the initiative sprang from the Tabernacle and communicated itself to the nun’s will; or whether she, by bending herself upon the Tabernacle, set in motion a huge dormant power. It appeared to me possible that the solution lay in the fact that two wills co-operated, each reacting upon the other. This, in a kind of way, appears to me now true as regards the whole mystery of free-will and prayer and grace. . . . Yes, and I in my stupid arrogance had thought

that my life was more active in God's world than hers. So a small provincial shopkeeper, bustling to and fro behind the counter, might think, if only he were mad enough, that his life was more active and alive than the life of a director who sits at his table in the city. Yes, that is a vulgar simile; but the only one that expresses what I knew to be true. There lay my little, foolish narrow life behind me, made up of spiritless prayers and efforts and feeble dealings with souls; and how complacent I had been with it all, how self-centred, how out of the real tide of spiritual movement. And meanwhile, for years probably this nun had toiled behind these walls in the silence of grace. . . ."

That is the real truth. Contemplatives are not deserters; they are in the forefront of the battle. They are not cowards, but silent heroes, warring against the *real* enemy and the *only* enemy. *In the world we have to do with effects: they are face to face with causes.* The ultimate truth about things is not in things visible, but in a cause that lies behind the visible. What is said and done in the world is not radical, but the effect of a cause which is behind the visible. Nothing material matters, except in so far as it is symptomatic of what eternally *is*. This is not true merely in a poetic

or parabolic sense, but absolutely true. Whatever the time-spirit may be, it is the victory or defeat of our contemporaries in regard to eternal things, thoughts and issues. When a great liner leaves the docks, it causes a great swell, which stretches a long way, causing ripple beyond ripple. Smaller crafts rock as it touches them, causing still smaller boats to rock and send out ripples of their own, and so on until the last ripple may touch your feet as you stand on the shore, far from the docks and from sight or hearing of what is happening there. But you have evidence that the ripple which touched you was caused by a greater, and the one before that by a greater still, and so on, back to the original cause. Something happens to you by way of influence for good, because of a word said, or a book written, by some one who in his turn was inspired by another, and so on back to the thought-force of some one who is praying and willing, and is in his turn moved to do so by a power which comes through the serried ranks of the saints and angels, from the very Throne of the one Cause and Absolute Being, God. And if you say, "but some influences for good come to me direct from God in my prayer," then you are proving my point, for in so far as this is true, it is because you are living in contact with God, having

some part and fellowship in the contemplative life.

What we think matters most in life, often has no importance at all. Will not your bustling activity, organising this and sitting on committees about something else, be brought to nothing by the advent of a new idea in ten years' time? Work is only permanent when it is willed by God, and even then we are under a delusion if we are surprised that God permits one generation to demolish the institutions and organisations of another. God is not interested mainly in the progress and success that shows on the balance-sheet, but in the eternal progress of men in faith, hope and charity, and the success that is sanctity. Matter is a veil, hiding reality. The world-noises are *effect*. Creative forces are silent.

One of the mightiest laws by which God rules the world, and the people in the world, is the law of prayer. The working of Providence is not changed by prayer. It is the will of God that prayer should be one of its laws, one of its causes, and not by any means the least. It is God's will to answer true prayer, and, with Him, to will is to do. He will not fail if we don't. I would go so far as to say that perfect souls, engaged in contemplation, actually *do* more even from the

viewpoint of the Utilitarian, than all the worldly machinery of men, because they attain the real power which is behind all.

There is perhaps more evidence in the world that God does answer prayer, than there is for anything else. A great multitude have given a glad testimony to this effect. St. Teresa said : " Everything that I have learnt in prayer, though it may be two years previously, I have seen fulfilled." Meaning that everything God made her understand was necessary, and that He would do, she saw fulfilled. In the nature of the case, we cannot know, this side of heaven, the smallest fraction of what God has wrought through prayer, especially through the prayer of one given wholly to God, the tiniest thread of whose life is linked with Almighty power, whose daily life is full of unseen spiritual miracles, whose altar lamp goes not out, whose prayer is in harmony with his life. One of the greatest answers to prayer is the fact that these contemplatives have heard the prayer of heaven, to leave all and follow Our Blessed Lord, have heard it and answered it, keeping nothing back. There can be no spiritual posing in a lonely cell, no imitation of others. The contemplative dies to the world, and all men are original in death. Are they *doing* anything ?

Like Jacob, they wrestle with God in the silence. With Abraham, they plead with God for the sinners of the city. And who knows what Divine Judgments are averted because they do so? They are part of God's restraining mercy. With Moses they intercede for those engaged in the world's conflict, and how many victories should we have without them?

In regard to the true nature of activity, St. Thomas Aquinas says: "The marvellous force of activity increases in a being in proportion with the perfection and simplicity of its nature, so that it increases by leaps and bounds as we pass from animal to man, from man to angel, and from angel on to God Himself." The Venerable Fr. Baker wrote: "Those that are inexperienced may, and often do, call this (contemplation) a state of idleness and unprofitable cessation, as Martha complained against her sister Mary; but those that have attained to a taste of it know it to be the 'business of all businesses' as St. Bernard calls it. . . . Those inexpressible devotions which they exercise, and in which they tacitly involve the needs of the whole Church, are far more prevalent with God than the busy endeavours and prayers of a thousand others. A few such secret and unknown servants of God are the chariots and

horsemen, the strength and bulwarks of the kingdoms and churches where they live.”

It is certain that many of us would do more if we did less and did it well, with less fever, with our whole mind, soul and strength.

There are people who say, when a gifted man enters a contemplative monastery, that he is wasting his talents and his life. One does not hear such people say that a man who lives for money is wasting his life, nor the pleasure-seeker, nor the spiritually blind, who think of life as bounded by the five senses and four square meals a day. As a matter of strict fact, the contemplative monastery is perhaps the only place where *nothing* is wasted, not a penny of money, not a moment of time, not a thought of the mind or a beat of the heart.

The state of the world to-day presents a spectacle of extraordinary spiritual need, for which the remedy must be extraordinary faith, prayer and penance. In this country, we have had a Christian ancestry, but there are grave reasons to suppose that we shall have a pagan posterity. The one hope is in the revival of contemplative life, and an increase in the already remarkable number of vocations to the Contemplative Orders. Sir Philip Gibbs has just published

a book called *The Day after To-morrow*, in which he asks "What is going to happen to the world?" In this book, almost everything is discussed, from atomic energy to the peril of world war, the growth of material power and scientific invention to the lack of growth in regard to ideals and spiritual outlook. The author says: "The world is waiting for a spiritual understanding of these material powers, and cannot afford to wait very long." Certainly the world, with all its inventions and so-called progress, seems to be helpless to increase true peace, happiness, or indeed to reduce the perils which menace all that makes life worth living. Are *we* wasting our time? Are there not wrinkles on the spirit of the world, and grave moral diseases at its heart, in spite of all we have done or can do? Unless something happens, we shall soon have to pay the bill, at enormous interest, for our materialism and pagan ideals. May the remedy not be with those who are living that supernatural life which never betrays? After all, may it not be possible that the world's greatest asset is those of its inhabitants who are wholly given to God? May it not be, that our help must come from those who live on the spiritual mountain tops, where the air is purer and the view vaster, whose distinguishing endowment is

supernatural ? Holy souls who have taken degrees in the university of eternity, possess no wealth, but are rich towards God : have not conquered armies, but have conquered themselves. There may be little hope or light in the world, but in the monastery the light burns brightly, and over all is the image of eternal hope.

Meditating on the state of the world to-day, one is bound to admit that this kind goes not forth except by prayer and fasting. It needs more and yet more of those who will give the necessary time and self-surrender, and will go apart into the necessary solitude. The prosaic soul does not and cannot leap suddenly into poetry. If any occupation of life demands the necessary conditions, surely this must be true of the highest and greatest occupation. If Nicodemus comes to embalm the dead Christ, it is because he has met Him before by night. Before the Day of Pentecost is fully come, there must be the unceasing prayer in the Upper Room. The most spontaneous thing often has the longest history. Often a man *seems* to rise to a great spiritual height suddenly, but he has been climbing for a long time.

My hope for the world is in these kings whose divine right is to serve, these monarchs who have learnt to obey, whose one apostolate is

intercession, these spiritual aristocrats who live for us all.

The gods of this world, honour, money, human respect and pleasure, do but answer our worship of them with a mocking laugh. These are years of disillusionment. Veneers are detected and mirages fade. When material enthusiasms droop, the mood grows pessimistic, as modern literature shows clearly. We have drunk the wine of our own way, our own will, and our own private judgment in this land too long; and the dregs have a bitter taste. Are they not after all right who have only listened to Our Blessed Lord and have heard Him say: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever." The goddess of Reason cannot help us. Reason alone, without authority and without spiritual dynamics, is sadly incompetent. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death." The hand of reason trembles before life's problems, and its lantern is blown out before it begins to understand them, unless the hand is guided by the Hand that was pierced, and the lantern is lit by the Light of the world.

“ Rapt in oblivion, the soul
Doth in a single moment learn
More than the busy brain and sense
With all their toil, could ever earn.

Mirrored within its God, it views
To-day, to-morrow and the past,
And faith sees here in *time* the things
That through *eternity* shall last.”

These are the words of the great Carmelite contemplative, St. John of the Cross.

You have a particular vocation : God's niche for you in the world. You may not yet know what it is, or such knowledge may come gradually, like a dawn.

Meanwhile, as Cardinal Newman says—

“ There is One who from above
Watches how the still hours move
Of our day of service done,
From the dawn to setting sun.”

The world would be a very different place, and the lives of Christians in the world much more difficult to live, if God were to call fewer men to the contemplative life in the cloister, or fewer men were to make the great act of self-sacrifice that the acceptance of this vocation entails. As St. Bernard said : “ The religious life is so much of the Church's essence that it began with it, or

rather the Church was begun by it." The decay of religion in the world, or the growth of it, depends mainly on the decay or growth of contemplative life in the religious Orders. The Venerable Father Baker says : " No doubt there is that the decay of religion hath principally proceeded from this preposterous disorder, viz. that in most religious communities active spirits have got the advantage to possess themselves of prelatures and spiritual pastorships over the contemplative, though the state of religion (by which he means the religious or monastic life) was instituted only for contemplation." (Sancta Sophia.)

If it be true that a great Order has invariably been born of a great necessity, it is equally true that the revival of a great Order has been so. The necessity for the spread of the contemplative Orders, on a scale commensurate with our need, is, I think, generally admitted by those who believe in the all-prevailing power of prayer.

Most of us are, by circumstances or a different vocation, kept in the world with time and attention largely conscripted by life's material duties and demands, but that is no reason why we should absolve ourselves from responsibility in regard to continual prayer, so far as that is possible, or the cultivation of an interior life. Many a saint has

found it possible to breathe the air of heaven though walking the highways of earth ; has made a synthesis of work and prayer ; has in the world escaped the provincialism of worldliness. Such men have been rare ; though, I believe, not so rare as we are tempted to believe. You may often pass in the street a man who gloriously transcends the rule. A patient investigation of his apparently commonplace life would lead you into a divine wonderland. A thread of true prayer is woven into the whole life of a great company of unrecognised and unknown children of God—unknown to us, but known in heaven. Prayer in the press of human things, as a first delight and not as a last resource, should be the aim of us all. Nevertheless God calls some—and He may be calling you—to that service of perfect freedom where, with nothing externally to distract, all the human powers and the whole of time may be given for superhuman purposes and eternal ends. The majority may do much in God's regular army, but those who are called must be picked men for special enterprises, the eyes and ears of the army. They must be lightly equipped, laying aside every weight.

We have, for a moment, to consider the difference between *two kinds* of dedicated lives—the

lives of men and women given to God in religious Orders whose business is to be active apostles of truth and charity, such as the Jesuit missionaries, intrepid men who venture into the heart of uncivilised countries and there spend their lives labouring to win souls to Christ, and the Sisters of Charity nursing the sick poor, providing for orphans. The greater part of the heroism of these apostles is hidden, but their work is obvious and cannot be denied. But the work of the contemplative can never be obvious, any more than can the rising sap in a field of wheat, or the grace of God in the hearts of men—only effects are visible whose cause may be guessed by the wise. “Some servants of God have been praying.” For the contemplatives labour alone with God, and they have no other success than His. Moses with hands uplifted in prayer, and thus overcoming the Amalekites, for all time teaches the truth that “one with God is a majority.” Mary of Bethany at the feet of her Divine Lord, type of the contemplative in all ages, reminds us that, though there are many things we may have, there is one thing we must have ; other things may be useful, but one thing for indestructible purposes is absolutely necessary. There has always been a Martha to complain, and I suppose there always

will be. Do not forget that Martha complained in good faith, and her modern counterpart may do so still ; but we have it on the authority of God Himself that " Mary hath chosen the better part." The complaint was the same : " Why does she not *do* something ? "

Those who best know the religious life, both active and contemplative, have no hesitation in affirming the superiority of the contemplative. Over and over again, we find this view stated in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, St. Gregory and St. Augustine.

A Carthusian writer says : " It would not be difficult to prove, logically and historically, that the number and state of the houses belonging to the Contemplative Orders supply a most exact criterion of the intensity and depth of Christian life in any country."

No one can overestimate the importance, influence or power of preaching, but its dangers are many, it is so easy for the language of the lips to outstrip the language of the heart. If any man needs prayer, it is the preacher. For twenty years I was myself a preacher to a Protestant denomination, and my most severe discipline since entering the true Church has been the discipline of silence so far as preaching is concerned. It is a tremen-

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dous privilege to preach, but any preacher would be the first to admit the subtle spiritual perils of public utterance. I know that some of the greatest preachers have become canonised saints, and that the men whose words have winged their way into the very souls of others, have themselves lived very close to God—but that was by reason not of their preaching, but of their prayer. Such were St. Dominic, St. Bernard, St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine. They preached with great spiritual result because they and others were praying. What we call the Acts of the Apostles might be truly called “The Acts of the Holy Ghost.” St. Peter’s great sermon followed the many days of prayer and contemplation in the Upper Room. The men who speak to men for God do much, but the men who speak to God for men do more ; and those who spend their whole lives in such speech to God do most.

It is perhaps not surprising that few people in the world have a real idea of the true value of the vows of a contemplative. They are vows that bind to release, as do the deliberate and set purposes of an athlete and a thinker, or the other vows of the marriage state. They leave phantoms for reality, the perishable for the eternal. St. Francis of Sales says of the religious vocation :

“ We are so blind that we persuade ourselves that we have done great things for Thee in abandoning these nothings ; while all the time it is Thou, O Lord, who hast done great things for us in leading us to renounce them.”

So many people say that they could never give up the hundred things in the world which give them enjoyment, and which the religious renounces. They look upon the first step—asceticism—as a kill-joy, a skeleton at the feast of life, an incarnate Don't. They say that the standard is too high, that a man ought to be able to serve God without renouncing so many innocent things. Such men may speak of “ the simple faith of the Gospels,” but they cannot have read the Gospels with a mind willing to adapt itself to the mind of Christ. For Our Lord offers the highest things, but at the full price. The tender Jesus Who raised the widow's son at Nain, said to those who were to be His *apostles* : “ If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (St. Luke xiv. 26.) Hard words, unmistakable words. Why should it be necessary ? I did not say it was necessary. The founders of the great religious Orders did not say it was necessary.

They have only quoted. It was Jesus Christ Who said those words. And He goes on to say : “ And whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. For which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it.” Our Lord knew that a half-hearted apostle does more harm than good. He knew that a man’s heart is where his treasure is, and human nature has curious treasures—a garden, a horse, a dog, a country house, some old pictures or a library. “ So likewise every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple. Salt is good. But if the salt shall lose its savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned ? It is neither profitable for the land nor for the dunghill, but shall be cast out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” That is the crux of the matter. The apostles were to go out into the world with their great sane teaching which would cleanse the unhealthiness of the world, and give back to life a hope and a savour. If they were not absolutely given to God, what hope was there that the world would ever become so ? And so, when it comes to His disciples, Christ takes this tone of absolute disregard of suffering or pain or

the price that must be paid. That is noteworthy in the Master who was training men to be the forefathers of generations of martyrs. But for that standard of austerity, you and I would not be Christians, for Christianity would not have spread even so far as Gaul. The Holy Spirit can only work great things with whole-hearted men.

But those who turn away, reluctant but decided, saying that it is too hard for them, are going away sorrowful before they have heard what it is that makes this austere life of the penniless friar, or the silent monk, or the lonely apostle, so much more than merely tolerable, so *joyous*. To begin with, there is another saying of Our Lord's which we must attend to. "There is no man that hath left house or brethren or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands for My name's sake, and for the Gospel, who *shall not receive an hundred times as much now in this time . . . and in the world to come life everlasting.*" (St. Mark x. 29-30.) It has been said that we only really possess those things which we have given to God in sacrifice. Certainly human love never shines so wonderfully as it does between those who have put the Kingdom of Heaven first. St. Augustine and St. Monica are for all time the ideal of mother and son, because she spent her whole life in pray-

ing and striving to change him from a great sinner to a great saint, and she was so patient that she obtained this great grace from God, and gave us one of the very greatest of the doctors of the Church. St. Elizabeth of Hungary and her husband were the most romantic lovers, and when he was killed on a Crusade, it was, ever after, death to live without him, for St. Elizabeth. It is impossible to read the life and writings of Père Didon, the great French Dominican orator, without envying the woman who had such a son, and marvelling to read of his grief when she died. Yet he had left her to be a Dominican, though she filled his heart. Blessed Jan Ruysbroeck, the Flemish mystic, was another devoted son, and although parted from his mother and living in his monastery, he wrote: "Those whom the Holy Spirit unites, enjoy, even when they are separated, the marvellous sweetnesses of a union intimate and spiritual." And that, I think, sums up the experience of those, who, like their Master, have left mother and home and country, and the familiar treasures of life, to help Him in bringing other souls to an eternal home and an abiding country. For love craves union, and union does not consist in being together geographically, but spiritually, united in mind and will. And when it is God who

beckons, then true union is assured, not by disregarding the call, but by the obedience of one, and the whole-hearted surrender of the other who is left behind.

The only soul who is never lonely is the contemplative who is conscious of God dwelling within him to bear him company. "It is impossible to be lonely," said an old apostle of our day, who was a contemplative in spite of his active life of preaching and teaching. The contemplative concentrates mind, heart and will on God. Before Him he lays all the true interests of the world. And he returns from his prayer, as did Moses from the Holy Mount, with the secrets of God in his heart, and the radiance of God on his countenance. As some one has finely said : "His cell is Bethlehem, where he begins a new life ; it is Nazareth, where his life of voluntary penance is passed in silence and obscurity ; it is Calvary, where obedience never ceases to offer him as a sacrifice on the cross which his observances and his rule raise up for him. He is able truly to say : ' I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh.' "

He realises that eternity is not only *Then* and *There*, but *Now* and *Here*. The world may perceive nothing in him but the commonplace. His

Kingdom and his Glory is within. There may be nothing outwardly very brilliant or heroic. Whatever claim he has to greatness is not in this world of shadows, but in the world of reality. He seems to be alone, but he is less alone than the worldling in a crowd. Such a life is not merely a picture of what men did in the heroic ages of faith, but what many are doing at this moment, of what many more may do when it pleases God to call them.

There can be no higher ambition than to contemplate the most high God, no wider field of service than to cover the whole world with the results of one's activity, to stand between a guilty world and an offended God with the shield of prayer.

Contemplation, according to Denis the Carthusian, is "an immediate, certain and affectionate knowledge of God." "It is," continues a modern Carthusian monk, quoting this definition, "a supernatural knowledge which has nothing in common with the intellectual result of theological and philosophical studies. It is a knowledge produced in the soul by the gift of Wisdom. The enlightenment, consequently, proceeding from contemplation, does more towards inspiring the will with love than the intellect with clear perception. Contemplation will be perfected in Heaven. It is

the habitual state of the Blessed who see God face to face."

God Himself is the Eternal Contemplative. The very name of God (Deus) is derived from a Greek word signifying contemplation. The end and aim of the contemplative is God Himself. The quest of his whole manhood, reason, emotion and will is to establish intimate relations with his Creator and Redeemer.

"These great contemplatives," observes Denis the Carthusian, speaking of such saints as St. Bruno, St. Gertrude and St. Teresa, "seem hardly to belong to humanity. They are such divinely endowed beings. They may, in a certain sense, be compared to God. It is usual to compare people to that which we imitate; and we become more like to the object of our imitation, the more perfectly we copy some special quality or characteristic of that object. I speak of a brave man as a lion. . . . I should call a deceitful man a fox. . . . Since then the essential Divine Action, and God's Essential Life, consists in knowing Himself and loving His own attributes with an infinite love, I may dare to call that solitary a Divine man, whose sole occupation consists in knowing God as fully, and in loving Him as perfectly, as possible."

Small wonder, then, that a human being who is capable of so marvellous a life, should, if he will not let God come into his life and fill it, know an intolerable unhappiness and misery. To refuse the yoke of Jesus which grace makes light and easy, is to invite a yoke much heavier and to no purpose. A life without God cannot but be hell, in this world and in the next. Men suffer more for the devil and for themselves than they do for God. The whole area of life, on its earthward side, lived without God, is full of valleys of humiliation and pain where the miasma-filled air hangs heavily. Boredom, loneliness, dread of death and judgment—are these not infinitely harder to bear than the peaceful austerities of the contemplative life? When the I, the Me, and the Mine, are the centre of a man's universe, the divinity of his worship, the object of his every pursuit, the end and aim of his existence, he suffers more, even in this life, than he would have done had he embraced the most austere and arduous life for Our Lord.

We must suffer if we would be perfect. Gold must be put in the crucible. Our Lord must sit as the Refiner of silver, watching until it is so pure that He can see His Face in it, undimmed by the alloy of self. But the penance of the purgative

way will add to, not subtract from, the worth of the soul and the value of living. Modern legislation, thrift and effort, generally regard ease as the goal of being. But the contemplative is pledged to an incessant warfare with self. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its lusts and concupiscences." They gladly suffer all earthly loss, and if necessary, welcome calumny and insult, but the secret of their joy is that in all, through all, and with all, they know they are seeking and doing the holy will of God. "And their joy no man shall take from them."

The contemplative seeks no comforts but for the soul. And these spiritual comforts which he seeks are not consoling visions and a sweet sense of resting in God, but the hard blisses of union with Christ Crucified. St. Teresa says : "The sufferings God inflicts on contemplatives are of so unbearable a nature that unless He sustained such souls by the manna of divine consolations, they would find their pains insupportable. . . . The dearer they are to Him, the more severe are their trials. . . . I feel certain that God gives by far the heaviest crosses to His favourites."

I often think that much of the hunger we in the world have for God, is rooted in the mortification of the contemplatives ; that our desire to pray is

often owing to their elimination of all inclinations which compete with the transcendent demands of the perfect life. For no man lives to himself—least of all a contemplative, and the urgency of his prayer stirs the distant hearts of men as the going out to sea of the great liner rocks small craft far down the bay. “An instant of pure love is more precious to God and the soul, *and more profitable to the Church* than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing were done,” says St. John of the Cross.

Even in the world God often takes everything from us that what cannot be taken may be strengthened. He destroys us, not *if* we do not give Him all, but *until* we do. God wars with what we call ourselves, until that appears which God saw when He said: “Let Us make man to Our Image.” A character in one of George Macdonald’s novels asks: “Why did God make me?” and the answer given is: “God has not made you yet: you are in the making, and you do not like the process.” So long as we cling to the perishable, the loving warfare goes on. The way is certainly narrow, but it is more than wide enough if we will “lay aside every weight.” If we so live that God has the victory at last, then:

“ The primal duties shine aloft like stars,
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Lie scattered at the feet of men like flowers.”

WORDSWORTH.

Such Christianity is not, as men say, “played out”; it has never yet sufficiently been “played in.” We have to choose between the ideal egotistic or altruistic, the Epicurean or the Christlike. If we choose the latter, then it means being :

“ Heated hot with burning fears,
And bathed in baths of hissing tears,
And battered by the strokes of doom
To shape and use.”

What for us is the mood of a moment, in the monastery is the permanent pose of the spirit.

The ground of the contemplative life is humility — a virtue little understood by the average man, who is apt to confuse it with such negative qualities as a lack of self-confidence. As pride was the first sin, and is the worst sin and the root of all sin, so humility is the root of all virtue. False humility is when we think ourselves too bad to try again, or to pray. As God grants His choicest gifts to whomsoever He will, it is false humility to deny that God will bestow them on us or has done so. If we grow in grace, we grow in

humility. True humility is knowing what it is to be a creature—drawing our whole existence from God, knowing that we can do nothing, but God can do everything if we give Him our will and attention. “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of Heaven.” People in the world, visiting a monastery, are often struck by the sunny candour and the naïve simplicity of the lay brother who waits on them, and even of the choir-monk who acts as guest-master. Monks have no appearances to keep up, no small pretences of position or learning, no interest in the opinions of other men about them. Humility has an almost humorous consciousness that the only opinion based on true knowledge, is the opinion of God—and that “He remembereth that we are dust,” our only loveliness being our finite likeness to Him.

So much for those things which all contemplatives have in general, and must have by the nature of their vocation—prayer, charity, austerity, humility. We must now review very briefly—for the scope of this lecture permits of no more,—the special characteristics of the different Orders, the Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Carthusians and the Carmelites. There are other Contemplative Orders, but these are the best known.

The Benedictines were the first Contemplative Order. For thirteen centuries now their monasteries have been the storehouses of learning and charity in the West. Their motto is "Peace." Their great work is the praise of God, mainly by the Divine Office said in choir with great state and beauty. Their music is famous as their learning. At one of their monasteries on the Continent, Beuron, they have what is probably the only living school of painting that is original and spontaneous, and their frescoes have become famous. Their hospitality—limited now, alas, by the loss of their Abbeys and Priories at the Reformation—is still famous for its charity, though it cannot be as wide in degree as it once was. At Quarr in the Isle of Wight, at Buckfast in Devon, as well as in other places where a school is attached to the monastery, and the work of education added to the contemplative life, you will find a Benedictine Abbey where the peaceful work of praise is carried on. A day's visit, and a talk with the guest-master, will tell you more about the Benedictine spirit than I could in a whole series of lectures.

The Cistercians, or Trappists, as they are sometimes called, were a branch of the Benedictines who wished to lead a still more austere and silent

life, and who, for this purpose, founded a separate monastery in 1098 under St. Robert, and later this was developed by St. Stephen Harding, an English monk. Their austerity takes the form of always being in community, working together and sleeping, not in cells, but in a dormitory, and yet in keeping a perpetual silence, except with their Superior, to whom every monk may speak. To this is added manual labour in the fields, and hundreds of square miles of Northern Africa and other desert places have been turned into useful and fruitful land by the ceaseless, unpaid toil of these silent men in their rough white habit. There is an Abbey of Cistercians—Mount St. Bernard, near Leicester, and a Cistercian Convent, where women, most of them delicately bred and highly educated, follow this hard rule and do their farming at Wimborne in Hampshire. The Cistercian vocation is pre-eminently to silence and toil, in worship of the silent Creator.

The Carmelites have a Priory in Kensington, and their beautiful church is well known by all Catholic Londoners who seek for a quiet place of prayer. Their devotion is to offer their lives in union with Our Lady's life of obedience to God. God is all; man is nothing of himself, and the existence he has been given by his Creator must,

in justice, be yielded back to Him in praise and humility and obedience. The realisation of this forms the Carmelite spirit. Their brown habits and white cloaks are symbolic of the mingled austerity and the peace of contemplation. Mental prayer is the essence of their life. Again of them I would say, get to know them at first hand. Visit their church. Call at the Priory and ask one of the friars to tell you of their vocation, and then form an opinion for yourself.

I would like to speak at greater length about the Carthusians, not only because I am best acquainted with them, but because they have built the greatest Carthusian cloister in the world not so far from here—at Parkminster in Sussex, and also because in a Charterhouse the contemplative life is lived in its fullest and simplest form, without the addition of any secondary characteristic of vocation, such as great attention to the Divine Office, as with the Benedictines, outdoor manual labour as with the Cistercians, or a certain admixture of active work as with the Carmelite friars, who, unlike the many Carmelite convents for women which God has raised up and filled with vocations in this country during the last ten years, do not lead an exclusively cloistered life.

A Carthusian monastery or Charterhouse con-

sists of many four-roomed houses called cells, where the monks spend the greater part of their time, meeting only to take recreation on Sundays and festivals, to say Vespers and the great night office in the vast choir of the church every day, and on Sundays and festivals likewise to dine together in silence in the refectory. Otherwise the monks dwell alone in their cells, taking some recreation in the little garden which is attached to each cell, working there or at the carpenter's bench in one of the four rooms of the "cell," or studying books borrowed from the great community library, which is the one thing in a Charterhouse that a man of the world might envy. Their austerities are many. They rise in the night between eleven and two o'clock to sing the Divine Office in choir, and to intercede for the world which is only awake for pleasure or pain. They wear a hair shirt always. They use that misunderstood instrument of penance, the discipline, frequently. Their fasts are frequent, and their abstinence from flesh diet perpetual. All their clothing is of coarse wool. Yet it is rather more the rule than the exception for a Carthusian to live to a great age.

Such is the exterior life of the Carthusians. It is not easy for a layman to find words to

speaking of their interior life. I will let a Carthusian speak of it. Of the night office, a Carthusian author says : " All Carthusians are unanimous in saying that this is their happiest time. Singing God's praises at the foot of the altar, in the stillness and darkness of the night when so many forget God and so many offend Him, gives an interior joy to the soul and a deep consolation, worth purchasing at any price." And again : " The night office never seems long to a fervent monk. This is a fact to which all testify who have enjoyed that happy experience." And this although they do not return to their cells much before half-past two, and at latest the bell will arouse them again at six o'clock, and on certain days even at five. The monks retire to bed at an hour at which any schoolboy would grumble, in order to get the bare six hours of sleep ordained to them. Six hours of the twenty-four for sleep : and six more for reciting the Divine Office and other prayers and praises. Who but a monk or nun gives to God's praise as many hours as they give to sleep ?

Solitude has always been the element in which God has made known His will to His servants. Jacob in the wilderness, receiving the dream of the ladder of angels, that symbol of God's inspira-

tions ; St. John on the lonely isle of Patmos, receiving the Apocalyptic vision ; Our Lord Himself withdrawn, “led by the Spirit into the desert”—those bear witness to the uses of solitude. “It is certain,” says Dom le Masson, “that study demands tranquillity and solitude. . . . No great idea can be worked out, except in solitude. . . . No sooner does any man seek to apply his mind to any subject, to dive into it, to arrange or direct it, than he is driven necessarily to seclude himself from others, to keep silence and to shut himself up alone.” In an article in the *Spectator*, dated 1st February 1890, we find these words : “Where a life of unusual strength is to be lived, it will be found that it can gain that strength only from solitude. . . . It is not those who wish to have their minds diverted from the burden of their own deepest thoughts who will mould the course of the world.” “Solitude,” said Père Didon, the great Dominican preacher, “is a terrible power.” And Tauler, another Dominican preacher, but better known as a mystic, has said : “No one does hear or understand what is in him, and what God says in his soul, until he is brought into this wilderness.” It is recounted of Gerlac Petersen, an Augustinian monk of Windesheim, that : “He loved to be alone and busied with

holy things, for then his heart being free and released from outward hindrances, he went into the presence of God whom he studied and desired to see, perceive, understand and enjoy ; for all his might and spiritual exercises were directed to this end."

The silence of a Charterhouse must be experienced—it cannot be described. There the stillness is alive, like the heart of a rose. It is the element of the spirit, where men can listen to that voice "which is heard without utterance, and without the sound of words speaks all truth." "There is no music in a rest, but there is the making of music," says Ruskin. The harsh noises of the city by the sea where I live, make music to my ears when I stand alone on the downs. So to the contemplative, withdrawn to the hills of prayer, does life sound musical, and the harmony of God's purposes can be heard through the discordant clamour of human selfishness. "It is in quiet and subdued passages of unobtrusive majesty, the deep, the calm and the perpetual, which must be sought ere it is seen and loved, ere it is understood, that the lesson of devotion is chiefly taught, and the blessing of beauty given," says Ruskin. There is a noise in the waved branches, but the roots are always silent and out of sight. Silence

came before creation. The Word Incarnate was born in the silence of midnight.

The Carthusian Order "has never needed to be reformed, because it has never become deformed." Not even the infamous agents of Thomas Cromwell could find the minutest grounds for condemnation. Fr. Dalgairns in his introduction to *The Scale of Perfection*, by that friend of the Carthusians, Walter Hilton, the English mystic, says: "No Order was so respected in England and the Teutonic countries as the Carthusian. Those who speak most mournfully of the bad state of Christendom just before the Reformation, always make honourable exception of the sons of St. Bruno. They were the directors of Gerard Groot . . . Colet, More and Fisher. One of their especial employments was the translation and propagation of good spiritual books, as we know from Surius, through whom Tauler and blessed Henry Suso were made known to the Church in a Latin dress."

Generation after generation of monks pass away, but the Order does not change. It is like a great picture, the foreground of which is perpetually changing, but the background always the same. Time, in that sacred silence, is but a name; and that silence is eloquent before the eternal Throne of God.

This wonderful Order was founded in 1084 by St. Bruno, a Canon of Rheims Cathedral, a man “consumed with longing for solitude.” Ever since then, the Carthusian monasteries have been strongholds of contemplation. This is the opinion of a very holy French priest who was famous for his eloquence—Père de Condron. “In the firmament of the Church, resplendent with so many stars, the admirable community of St. Bruno shines like a sun. It is high above all others as the sky is above the clouds. If other religious deserve to be spoken of as doves because of their swift flight, these may be spoken of as eagles. They are as different, to put it more strongly still, from all those other holy societies, as was the risen Christ from the Christ still shrouded in our poor humanity. Our Lord has chosen to enrich His Church with this remarkable Order, that it may be the image on earth of His risen life. . . . They seem to be men chosen by God to represent, as simply and clearly as possible for human beings, the state of those spoken of in Holy Scripture as ‘the children of the Resurrection,’ and to live, in a mortal body, as if they were immortal spirits. They are continually raised above themselves by the contemplation of things Divine. For them there is no night ; for when the earth is wrapped

in darkness, they are engaged in the holy offices of the children of light."

Four men of the world went to visit a Carthusian monastery, and one of them, much interested in all he saw, turned to his companions and said: "Gentlemen, I must believe one of two things: either these men are mad—or we are. We think that life consists in never facing one's real self, but in being constantly carried away by the whirlwind of business or of pleasure. But here are men who condemn themselves to live face to face with realities, with no amusements and no respite. This is a problem that I mean to solve."

He did so, and became a monk.

That is where a survey of contemplative monasteries leaves us—faced with the challenge their existence makes to us, who had once thought of them as men only half-alive. To any sincere Christian, this must be matter for thanksgiving that there are such men in existence whose whole life is praise and intercession, and matter also for that vivifying virtue—humility. But to the world this challenge of monastic life is always a thorn in the flesh. "If you had been of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you," said Our Lord.

In the time of the Reformation, there was a persecution of the Carthusians in which eighteen Carthusian monks, with their Prior, perished after cruel and protracted suffering. Their sole crime was that they affirmed their fidelity to the authority of the Pope in matters of faith, and refused to submit their conscience to the will of the King, in condoning his refusing obedience to the Pope who forbade his adulterous union with Anne Boleyn. They died, praying for the King, joyful to have the crown of martyrdom, wondering not that the world persecuted them, for so it persecuted the men of God in past ages.

Martyrdom sows the seeds of faith and holiness. It was to the three hundred years of martyr blood that we owe the era of holiness and monastic life which immediately followed it, beginning with the Fathers of the Desert, and developing into the great monastic Orders of which I have spoken, and which are in existence to-day in this country. The Carthusians were far from being the only monks and religious martyred for conscience' sake at the Reformation. All the monasteries in England were represented in that glorious assembly at the gibbet. To-day, there is a fashionable

craze for St. Francis of Assisi, who is portrayed in a picturesque guise, a vagabond running wild from ecclesiastical authority ; a picture that my priest-reverencing, obedience - loving Seraphic Father would destroy as an insult that even his humility and patience would not brook. His statue is erected in Anglican churches and colleges. Non-conformist children are taught about him in Sunday Schools. But in the Reformation they hung, drew and quartered the still quivering bodies of his friars at Tyburn, for the sin of keeping the Rule he gave them. So the world wags. The old legends of flowers springing up where drops of blood fell from those who suffered and died for Christ, tells a great truth. The ancestors of the men and women who have vocations to the religious life to-day, were those martyred monks and friars.

It is often supposed that the men and women who enter religious Orders are those who have failed and been disappointed in the world. Only the last part of the idea is true. Vocations come to those souls who are disappointed with the world—who see it in all its worthlessness, and see the Kingdom of Heaven in all its majesty and marvel. A monastery is not made on the principle of a mousetrap. It is much easier to get out of a

novitiate than to get into one, for no religious Order has any use for a novice with no real vocation. Not that any one could endure the hardships and discipline of a religious Order if they had not a true God-given vocation. "Just as the sea casts out dead bodies, so a strict Order frightens away those who, without being called by God, are only guided by human considerations," says St. Teresa. A vocation is the special and unique purpose for which a soul was created by God, and if that purpose is fulfilled, the soul will be holy and happy; if not, it will be miserable and lost. A vocation always requires sacrifice, and often requires courage. The girl who goes out to a distant land to be married, knows that it may be years before she sees her relatives and friends again, and the dangers and discomforts of her new life will be many. But what is that to her? She is going to be the wife of the man she loves. To a member of a religious Order, such an undertaking may seem precarious. As a nun said to a friend of mine: "Fancy all your happiness depending on a human being, how awful! I am sure I should never have had the courage to trust my life to a mere *husband* if I had not had a religious vocation. One always knows what God will do, because He can never change or fail."

THE GUILD SHOP
520 CLEMATIS
WEST PALM BEACH,
FLORIDA

And her ceaseless toil among orphans seemed light to her, because it was her vocation.

The question that rises to the lips of any one, who comes into contact with the life of a convent or monastery for the first time is : “ Are they really happy ? ” The niece of a famous French novelist became a contemplative nun, and when he wrote her life, he quoted the following words from one of her letters : “ Our life is not only the grace of graces, but the happiness of happinesses ! The novices are gay to an extent you would have to see to believe—gay with a joy that brims over ! As for obedience, it is our rest and our happiness. That is what makes our life so easy and so sweet.” Yet that nun’s religious life was passed in almost continuous bodily suffering, caused by a serious disease which proved to be incurable. “ After baptism,” said St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, another contemplative nun, “ a vocation to religion is the greatest grace God can bestow.” “ Oh, dear me ! ” marvelled an old lay brother of a contemplative monastery, looking at some visitors, “ I am sure I don’t know how it is these people can’t see that the contemplative life is the only thing worth having in the world ! ” In the midst of her penances, St. Catherine of Sienna cried aloud : “ All the way to heaven is heaven, for He has

said : ‘ I am the Way.’ ” In some souls there is a capacity for joy or suffering so deep, that they seem to be instruments framed for the making of great harmonies before God.

“ There are hearts
So perilously fashioned, that for them
God’s touch alone hath gentleness enough
To waken and not break their thrilling strings.”
Mrs. HEMANS.

If they suffer with Christ, they will suffer without the bitterness that breaks such hearts, and they have the corresponding capacity for joy. Fr. Faber has said : “ Nothing glorifies God so much as joy.”

A holy Jesuit Father, lately dead, when asked how one might know whether one was doing God’s will and fulfilling one’s vocation, said that “ the answer is yes, if you are happy—permanently, deep-down happy, whatever may be your troubles at the moment on the surface.”

So many of the people one meets are anything but happy, and some of the unhappiest are those who have most of what the world considers to be comforts and pleasures. Poor Amiel in his Journal says : “ I have not given away my heart, hence this restlessness of spirit.” Most unhappy people

find there is no one to give it to. Human beings are faithless or are taken away by circumstances or by death. Of course there is God, but what use is a poor heart to God, who has all His saints and angels to love Him? Besides, it is such a large heart, with its great capacities for love and generosity, if only anybody cared and wanted it. To each of us, Our Lord answers as He answered the newly-widowed Madame de Miramion when He appeared to her in a dream one sad night, and called her to help Him with souls: "Your heart is not too large for Me." She did magnificent work for Him among the poor in France after that, although she had thought her life was finished.

It is absurd to think that God does not want *you*. Why, then, did He make you, and why did He die to redeem you? Why does He continue to give you life? Possibly you have always been considered to be of not much good in the world. But God's judgments are based on very different considerations. "Each soul . . . has its own secret with Him," says St. Bernard. This secret—or "vital secret," as William James the psychologist calls it—is only another word for our vocation. What if yours should be to the contemplative life in the cloister?

If all the earth and its riches were laid at your feet, if all the honours of the world were offered you at the same time—and on the other hand a vocation to a Contemplative Order, which would you choose? You would not hesitate for a moment if you could see what God sees, what the angels see, what the martyrs see, what a monk sees, what the dead see. St. Bernard says: “A religious lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed more frequently with heavenly graces, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is cleansed more quickly and rewarded more abundantly.”

Consider what a power for good is each contemplative. What the devil really fears is prayer, and above all monastic prayer. You long for England to have given back to her the old Faith of our Fathers. Listen to what Fr. Faber has to say about that: “I believe if this unhappy land is ever to be converted . . . it will be by some Religious Order or Orders who shall exhibit . . . the vision of evangelical poverty in its sternest perfection. The land that has forsaken Christ must gather to the Baptist first, and be attracted to the Jordan by the simplicity of supernatural strictness and antique austerity. The great work . . . I much think, is a

triumph in this land reserved only for evangelical poverty.”

Poverty is one of the necessities of every contemplative—the renunciation of every possession—which makes him heir to spiritual riches and powers. It is one of the virtues which our country to-day does not understand. England has forgotten the place of many great virtues in Christianity, such as humility, obedience, poverty, penance, silence. England has forgotten the *duty* of prayer. What schools can be raised up to re-inculcate these virtues except those schools where they will be living virtues, namely the monasteries? It has been prophesied by holy missionaries that one day England will return to the Faith, and will become an island of saints, and will do great and marvellous things for Christ in the world. Whence is this power of resurrection to come?

The world is not satisfied with the banquet of the senses. The big drums beaten loudly by its demagogues with their nostrums make no music in the heart. Men are weary of the resources of materialism, of jaded intellectuals, and of the platitudes of unbelievers in clerical collars. Amid the litter which private judgment in matters of faith and morals has made of the sanctities of

life, the imprisoned soul cries out : “ Who will deliver me from the body of this death ? ”

There is only one institution where may be found a working hypothesis of the true ends of human existence which fits all the facts, or speaks coherently about spiritual remedies, and that institution is the Catholic Church. Many a time has that Church, which is “ His Body,” come to the help of humanity in its deep need. The Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. It will come to the need of humanity in this country again. And it is my profound belief that it will largely do so through a revival of the Contemplative Orders, whose members it put to death.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE IN THE WORLD

CONTEMPLATION in the world sounds like a contradiction in terms, especially in the world of the present day.

Nevertheless, the contemplative ideal has been attained by people living in the world, and therefore can be. Indeed, it is a nucleus of contemplatives in the world who will, in all probability, be with the cloistered contemplatives, the main factors in its redemption, and will provide the only answer to its questions. The very fact that the will of God keeps some contemplative souls outside of the cloister suggests that their vocation is not so much to see God in His Eternal Laws and mysteries, which is the vision of the cloistered contemplative, but to see Him in and through the temporal and the transient, Whose solitude can never be interrupted by the impertinent ignorances of mankind, and Whose silence is not stirred by the babel of opinions. There can, of course, be no hard and fast distinctions between the interior life of the cloistered and the uncloistered contemplative, the monk in his

cell and the layman in his profession, but, broadly speaking, the contemplative in the world is a witness to the Changeless One undefiled by the dust of our traffic, undisturbed by its din, though so intimately present to every one of us, and numbering the hairs of our head. The vocation of the contemplative in the world is to be united to God, in the world but not of the world, as is God Himself. Never was there a greater need for apostles and evangelists ; but the dynamic force behind them must be prayer, and contemplation is the apotheosis of prayer.

Cotter Morrison has said that “the religion of the future will have the deepest reverence for moral worth, the tenderest pity for the frailties of human nature, and a belief in the final perfectibility of man.” That is an inadequate picture of the Catholic Church, which is characterised by all that and so infinitely much more. Ideals must be accompanied by dynamics. These flowers in the soil of man’s need must have roots. Reverence for moral worth is seen only through the eyes of the Son of Man. Pity is only adequately felt in His Sacred Heart. The final perfectibility of man is a chaotic day-dream, unless it means the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Before we begin to work for the welfare of the

world, we must have some vision of our object and end. *Quo Vadis?* The average journalist-philosopher has no idea what a help it would be to him to know where he was going. "The end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to that end," says St. Thomas Aquinas. Is it to be physical, mental or spiritual progress? What do we want to do with men and with ourselves? Is the housing question to be answered only in terms of Government houses, or are its roots in something deeper than civic economy, in something in which political economy has its roots, in ethics, and that in which ethics has its roots, in the question of a Divine Law-giver, in the question of the Being in God? What is man's chief end? The answer is in the Penny Catechism and in our own hearts. There is a vision of the moral nature which is duty. Any ethical system expects that every man this day will do his duty. But few are agreed as to what that duty is. There is a vision of the soul which is faith, and which moves mountains in the way. There is a vision of the heart which is love—love which, according to Catholic teaching, "informs all the virtues"—and this is the vision of God with which the contemplative is occupied. What man can see what is wrong with the world

unless he can see what is right in the world—the eternal and indestructible purpose of God? To leaven the whole, to turn the minds of men in the right direction, there must be contemplatives among our statesmen, our politicians, our writers to the Press, our soldiers and sailors, our shopkeepers and factory girls, among the children in the streets of our cities. Is this an idealistic dream? I do not think so.

We have considered, to some extent, the nature of contemplation in a previous lecture. According to St. Thomas, contemplation begins by attention to material objects, to the order and disposition of these, according to the purposes of God revealed by faith and reason. “From the visible, man is led to consider the invisible. When the mind turns to the contemplation of things invisible without the help of images, when in the light of revelation the mind of man rises to the knowledge of truths which are above the capacity of pure reason. And lastly, when, in the light of divine revelation, a man comes to the knowledge of truths which not only are above the capacity of the human reason, but even seem to go counter to it, as for instance the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.”

This would suggest that contemplation begins in a natural inclination of the mind to “wonder

why things are," and to consider them in relation to the Mind that conceived them. One finds such contemplative instincts in nature-lovers such as Thoreau and Richard Jefferies; but these ideas were barren, for in such men reason is often distorted by inherited tendencies, or by the spirit of the age, and, having no faith, cannot mount above itself and the limitations of time. A child is frequently contemplatively inclined, but without the succour of faith; when it comes to the age of reason, those instincts will die rather than develop. It needs the encouraging sanctions of an external authority to reassure the mind that it is not alone, and other existences are not opposed to it, in its desire; but rather that

" All things linkéd are
So thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star."

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

Since one Mind created all things, and is manifested in all things, and has revealed Himself—thus giving the greatest of all sanctions to the innermost cry of man's being, that the Creator should break His infinite silence and call him by name.

In a previous lecture we have seen that

contemplation, in all its varying forms and stages of development, is the loving embrace of God and man, attentive to each other. We have seen that Catholic mysticism is simply a life in the sunshine of God's holy presence, rooted in the humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and united to Him. There is that natural contemplation which is a natural instinct or impulse of man. Catholic contemplation is rather a reaction of the soul to God's initiative, the spirit of man stirring to the touch of the Spirit of God.

Let me, as briefly as possible, recall the fundamental elements in a life of Catholic contemplation.

Primarily, there must be abiding sorrow for sin. Newman said that a good man never forgives himself. The more we know of God, the more we realise our unworthiness to approach Him, not so much by reason of our individual sins, which may—by reason of our character and circumstances—be great or few ; but by reason of our frail nature, inconstant, divided, doing what we will not to do, and failing to do the things we will to do. Our changefulness and God's changelessness—our narrow hearts and His generous love : that is the matter of abiding sorrow for sin, apart from the separate harm we have each done to the plans of

His Goodness by our selfishness and impatient ignorance. We cannot look in the face of Christ without compunction. The more we learn by heart of His mercy and love, the more we are inclined to say : “ Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Longfellow says of “ The sifting of Peter ” :

“ One look of that pale suffering Face
Will make us feel the deep disgrace,
Of weakness ;
We shall be sifted, till the strength
Of self-conceit be changed at length
To meekness.

Wounds of the soul though healed will ache,
The reddening scars remain, and make
Confession ;
Lost innocence returns no more ;
We are not what we were before
Transgression.

But noble souls, through dust and heat,
Rise from disaster and defeat,
The stronger,
And conscious still of the divine
Within them, lie on earth supine
No longer.”

The memory of sins may be *used* ; we may press them into the service of humility. When they are at last overcome, and we have, by the

mercy of God, grown in grace, humility will not decrease, but abound more and more. For humility is not reached by subtraction, but by addition. Humility at its height does not say : " I have nothing, therefore I am humble." But rather : " The vast nature of my treasure makes me wholly and for all time in debt to God Who gave me all, even my very being." Sinners are proud as is Lucifer, proud of their independence and the way their passionate nature makes others give way to them. They are only humble when they are penitent, that is, when they have the virtue of contrition. The deepest humility is found where there was no sin—in Mary Immaculate. The Divine Son of our Blessed Lady was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin ; and He said : " Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart." In this consciousness of our nothingness—that our very life is taken moment by moment from the Hand of God—there springs that right relation to God which is the fulcrum of our contemplative life. The depths of our need of Him is our capacity for Him. God is always moved by *need*.

A marked characteristic of God's education of those who are living the contemplative life in the world—as compared with the cloistered contem-

plative—is His use of *humiliation*. The cloistered contemplative has no possessions, acts by obedience, keeps silence, and has made a complete severance with the world. But what the monk does by one heroic act of renunciation, has to be done in the uncloistered contemplative by a Divine use of circumstances, and by his acceptance of these in continuous acts of abandonment to Divine Providence. A modern French Jesuit has said : “ He comes into our lives like a sword, and we bleed from His visits.” It is hard to have one’s bread to find, and yet to “ leave one’s nets ” that one may become a fisher of men by union of will and energy with the Divine Fisherman : hard to give one’s whole mind to the duties of one’s profession, and yet to be utterly detached from it, and attached only to a perfect love of the will of God : to be diligent and careful, as though one worked side by side with Our Lord and St. Joseph in the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth, and yet to “ take no anxious thought for the morrow,” and “ be in nothing solicitous.” Yet this is the austerity provided and ruled by God for the mystic in the world. Again, it is hard to bear the responsibility of representing Christianity and the Catholic Church as every Christian and Catholic must do, and yet to wear, when God lends it, that

garb which Our Lord put on for our salvation, as of one "despised and rejected of men." A saintly priest, lately dead, used to say : "If your ways are not approved of, be happy : neither were Our Lord's."

From a patchwork of our sins, our faults, our mistaken judgment, our mannerisms, other people's uncharitableness, disfiguring circumstances, things that show us in a wrong light, the fact that motives are always hidden—from these things God will make for the contemplative in the world, a motley that will provide him with as good humiliation as St. Francis' sackcloth. The Benedictine has his black habit, the Carthusian his white, the Franciscan his brown—but this patchwork of humiliating appearances is what God weaves for His contemplative in the world. St. Paul, writing to the converts who had been clothed by the Apostles in the white robes of baptism, compares their hard-won innocence with his toil-stained motley. "We are made a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ : we are weak, but you are strong : you are honourable, but we without honour." If, with Christ, the mystic is to obtain graces of wisdom and strength for other souls, it must be by putting on,

with Christ, the semblance of weakness and folly. Yet even in this case, "the habit does not make the monk." Humiliation is, of itself, worse than useless. It is humiliation endured with courage when it seems to be eating into the very flesh, and finally kissed with real love and worn in peace and joy, that transforms the eager novice into the established servant of God and apostle to souls. Religion is always an experimental science; and only those who, as postulants, put on this habit, can taste the truth of the saints concerning it. Humiliation is not merely a habit, it is a cloister, where the soul can find a solitude from all the ambitions and plans and enthusiasms of the day, and most, from the cheerful sound of his own stir in the world :

"Exempt,

In the safe shadow of the world's contempt."

COVENTRY PATMORE.

Roughly speaking, what the mystics have called the Purgative Way is the establishing in the soul abiding sorrow for sin, and the putting on of the habit of humility. In the Illuminative Way, the soul begins to enter into the *joy* of her Lord, and to take her place in the choir of contemplatives, who find their happiness in the adoration and praise of God.

There is always, in the illuminative way, the realisation of the fact, emphasised by Baron von Hugel in his *Life of Prayer*, that "God is a stupendously rich Reality." In the phrase of a French Benedictine, "God is the only really interesting Being"—all else deriving its attractiveness from Him Who created it. The mystic, and particularly the lonely mystic in the world, becomes more and more absorbed in this Interest. God, the nature of God, the ways of God, the purposes of God, the glory of God—these occupy his mind and heart. He realises the living truth of St. Augustine's words: "The world is not for our enjoyment. The things that are for our enjoyment are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." The will of the Father, the work of the Son, the power of the Holy Ghost—these does he look for, and see, and consider, in the events of daily life. And in these he begins to find the inexhaustible fund of interest and true enthusiasm. He begins to dare to praise the unseen work of God, and His hidden meanings in permitting things that seem inexplicable, and thus venturing out on the sea of faith, walks on the stormy water that has drowned so many faint-hearted, and comes to the Master who has lighted a fire of coals, and laid fish there, in preparation for a feast of strength-giving joy.

And so he comes, by the illuminative into the unitive way, when not only his thoughts will be absorbed in God, but his whole being; when he will live, yet not he, but Christ living in him. It is then that he is forever lost to the world, and it is then that God will probably use him as a power in the world, for then he will waste no energy in private enthusiasms and "good ideas" of his own, but will move at the bidding of God alone, an obedient and intelligent tool in the Hand of God—more, an *alter Christus*, living only for the praise of God and the salvation of souls.

Very briefly and roughly, this is the life of mystics in the world—differing in each case according to the circumstances of their vocation, but almost invariably alike in these stages of development and final achievement.

We must now answer those who doubt whether the contemplative life can be lived in its fullness in the world, and whether it is according to the mind of Christ in His Church that it should be so.

The contemplative life is usually associated with a convent or monastery, which is, of course, its natural home, and as perfect an environment for its development as may be secured in this world. But that contemplation is only for religious is a prejudice which the devil is more interested in

perpetuating than anybody else, as also the heresy that practical occupations are neutralised by prayer; the truth, of course, being that true prayer inspires action and gives it direction and indestructible power. The Catholic Church has always called men and women in every state of life to make themselves capable of the highest gifts of prayer. It is interesting to remember that St. Gregory's principle expositions of contemplation were given, not in conferences to his monks, but in public sermons preached in the Lateran Basilica. St. Bernard said: "I should think there is no one at all among the faithful members of the Church, with respect to whom it may not be justly inquired, whether the Bride's mystical saying is not realised in some degree in him: 'My Beloved is mine and I am His.'"

And further, it is the opinion of those who are in a position to speak with authority on the matter, that this age will be characterised in history by the number of contemplatives living in the world, as though the contemplative life *brimmed over* from the cloisters. Certainly, since the War, these authorities tell us that there has been a great increase of vocations to the contemplative Orders. In the last ten years, many new Carmelite convents have been established in

England in great fervour, and poverty, and humility. And from those centres of devotion the holy infection of prayer has spread. A would-be retreatant, applying for permission to be received at Parkminster this year, was told that so great was the number of requests, that it was only possible to receive those who had not had the privilege of making a retreat there for the last year or two. A great demand, mark you, to pass a few days in silence and solitude and considerable discomfort, due to the absence of many of the common alleviations of life such as tea and tobacco ! A man does not go to Parkminster to add one more experience to his traveller's bag. At least, he certainly would not stay his full time, let alone go for a second time, unless it were God, and God alone, he was seeking. There is no doubt about it, it *is* happening. The age of jazz and motor cars, at which we shake our heads and shrug our shoulders, is something more than it appears to be in the daily picture-papers.

Nothing could be more revealing than a brief survey of the lives of some of those mystics of our own time—people we may have passed unknowingly at a railway station—who, having fulfilled their vocation while we were living our own lives, and having been obedient unto death, have entered

into life. The number of unknown saints would probably astonish us, but even from the number of those whose biographies have been given to us, it is not difficult to make a selection of such widely differing characters that we are bound to admit there is no circumstance or condition of life, neither youth nor age, lack of education, health or leisure, that hinders the Holy Spirit of God in His work of sanctifying a willing soul. Again, we shall see each vocation as distinct. Some of these souls were called to endure extraordinary sufferings, both by the use of severe penance and by mystical union with the sufferings of Christ. Others were called to live in the ordinary circumstances of their state of life, without adding anything to the devout practices of any very good Catholic. Only one extraordinary trait have they in common—an extraordinary devotion to God's will and to His purpose for their individual life. And in this, by grace, they are imitable.

To begin with a familiar name, here is Gemma Galgani, the daughter of a tradesman in Lucca, to whom pain came as an apostle, teaching her innocent mind, before she was twenty-one, the great realities of the mystical life. Cured of meningitis suddenly by the intercession of another young saint lately canonised, she received the gift

of the stigmata, which was renewed every Thursday night at the hour of Christ's Agony in the Garden, always causing intense suffering. To these wounds were added other marks of Our Lord's sufferings, of the Crown of Thorns, of the Scourging, and of the great wound in the shoulder inflicted by the weight of the Cross. Also, in some mysterious way, she suffered at times a mental agony as though in union with the mental Passion of Christ. And yet she went on living an ordinary life, the comfort and stay of a very poor household, since her father was dead and they had lost almost all their money. Later, she was adopted by a well-to-do acquaintance who was a very holy woman, and who recognised something of Gemma's spiritual worth. In this new household, she was the busiest and most helpful and most practical of women, and this while interiorly she was living a life of close union with Our Lord, suffering extraordinarily by His permission for the conversion of sinners, hiding the signs of the wounds that were impressed on her flesh between Thursday and Friday, as ingeniously as she could. Always absorbed in prayer, her duties were never neglected, and if a service was required to be done, Gemma was there to do it in her simple loving way, and with the tranquillity which

characterised her. Gemma was deeply attracted to the Passionist Order (to which belonged Father Dominic, who received John Henry Newman into the Church, and who was by his prayers an apostle of England). But the priests to whom the direction of her beautiful soul was given, considering the circumstances which pointed to Our Lord's will for her, told her that clearly she was not to become a nun, but that it was Our Lord's will that she should be "a Passionist in spirit only." In the last years of her life, her confessor bade her pray that all outward signs of the stigmata might be taken from her, so that she might not be remarkable. Obediently she did so, and the signs of the stigmata disappeared, but the pain of them was not removed, but even increased slightly. She died, suffering and praying, in 1903. Although she has not yet been canonised, many conversions and cures have been granted through her intercession.

Another case of a contemplative in the world who "in spirit" belonged to a religious Order, is recounted by that well-known French Jesuit, Père Raoul Plus. Marie-Antoinette de Geuser's life was mainly spent in being the ideal elder sister to a large family who lived in a country house in France. Her mother being delicate, she had

to step into a position of authority at the head of the children and servants, and to watch over the lessons and the holidays of the "little ones." A difficult, shy character naturally, deeply affectionate and intellectually gifted, she gave her will to God, and the life she lived interiorly devoted only to His will, shone out radiantly with a beauty that made her infinitely attractive. She wanted to become a Carmelite. Reasons of health—a nameless, unsatisfactory condition of general health—delayed this again and again, until it was clear that she was to be a Carmelite only on the couch of a permanent invalid. And from that couch she gave her life to God and her neighbour in prayer and patience, developing a remarkable knowledge of theology from her constant contemplation of God, and letting this knowledge shine forth in the letters that she humbly wrote to her brothers and friends. Her ladder to heaven was not so much pain, as in the case of Gemma Galgani, but a passionate devotion to the will of God, which seemed finally to annihilate for her any distinction between pleasure and pain. The will of God was her heaven on earth. Here is a life as imitable as Gemma's is not. Both were lives wholly yielded to God, different because He chose to make them so. She died at

the age of twenty-nine in a state of union with God remarkable even among the mystics. That life was lived in our day, for she died in 1918.

The vocation to a contemplative life in the world is not confined to young girls. Here is a young Italian soldier, Giosuè Borsi, whose name is now well known because of his "Confidences with God," written mainly in the trenches and found among his papers after his death in action in 1915. One phrase of his, taken haphazard from his burning words, will give us an idea of his mind.

"From me . . . the healing of the sick, convulsed world may begin; I can be the first cell repaired in the decayed tissue. . . . Perhaps, if I let this moment pass, all will be lost forever, and I shall be the only one to blame. . . . All the collective movements of mankind are determined by the will of each. In the day of victory, every individual shall have the entire credit, and in the day of defeat will feel the awful, terrifying weight of all the blame. It is as simple and exact as a mathematical axiom. . . . O Lord . . . bless my efforts if Thou seest a good will in me, punish me with Thy lightning-like, inexorable, eternal chastisement if Thou seest in me the smallest act of weakness and cowardice. I know what I

am asking. I am ready for any sacrifice. I hope and trust in Thee alone."

Is not that manhood? Is that simply the fire and passion of young Italy, or is it the fire and force of Christianity in the soul of a young man whose country was the whole world, the Kingdom of Christ? Is that the selfishness of one of those dreamy mystics? Or is it the voice of one who was prepared to "fill up what is wanting of the sufferings of Christ," who bore the whole burden of renewing our fallen nature?

Nor yet is this vocation confined to men and women. It has come to children who have barely attained the age of reason. Here we may see it in the soul of a child still in the nursery. Guy de Fontgalland died in 1925 at the age of twelve. Four years previously he had made his First Communion, and it was not until his death that he told his mother, whom he adored, that Jesus had told him, on the day of his First Communion, that he would die early. He added, naïvely, that was the reason why he had not bothered much about his work at school, as it didn't matter, as he was going to die. Playing with his Meccano until the paralysis stilled his fingers, and giving his cherished dynamo to his small brother as his last will and testament, he

died, saying : “ Jesus, I love you. . . . Mum-my ! ” As he had foretold, he died on a Saturday, going straight, as he said, from his mother on earth to his Mother in heaven. Here are some of his sayings : “ What did you ask Jesus for at Communion ? ” he was asked. “ It was Jesus who spoke. I listened and just said : Yes.” And again : “ The nicest word to say to Our Lord is : Yes. If Our Lady hadn’t said that at the Annunciation, where would the world be now ? ” And when he was dying, consoling his mother with his best caresses, he said : “ If Our Lord wants me, let Him have me. I didn’t tell you at first because it would have made you suffer.” That child of eight had kept silence for four years rather than cause his mother suffering before it was necessary. For himself, all he knew was that Jesus wanted him in heaven, and if so, He must have him. Here again is this note of adoration of the hidden purposes and will of God.

And younger still. Irish children are familiar with the name of “ Little Nellie,” the child of a poor Irish labourer, a mere baby, a martyr to a spinal complaint, who died at the age of four years in an orphanage. All who came in contact with her realised that round this tuberculous

child there was an atmosphere of sanctity. Yet she was a perfectly natural baby, fond of her pink socks and toys. But learning about the Blessed Sacrament, the Infant Jesus, and the Passion of Our Lord in the convent orphanage, one thought seemed to absorb her mind—of Him whom she called : “ Holy God.” Gradually, it became her one occupation to pray—for everything and every one—to put aside all else for the rosary and crucifix, to lie still when the pain was almost intolerable because “ poor Holy God lay still on the Cross.” She would know who had been to Holy Communion and who had not, and when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, though her room was not near the chapel and no one had spoken of it to her. She would say to her nurse in the morning : “ Go down to Mass, an’ get Holy God, an’ come back and kiss me.” And when the nurse would do so, immediately after she had received Communion, the child would receive the kiss in silence, as though it were a sacrament. At last a Jesuit Father, convinced that the child understood perfectly the nature of Holy Communion, obtained permission from the Bishop to give Nellie her First Communion, as it was obvious that the child would not live to grow up.

Nellie's joy was indescribable. "I will have Holy God in my heart," was the burden of all she said, and the night before the great day she could not sleep for excitement, waking her nurse early. "The child," wrote the prudent Jesuit Father, "literally hungered for her God, and received Him from my hands in a transport of joy." There was no excitement for the rest of that day—but a great calm. The other children brought her gifts, but as soon as they were gone the hands were joined and Nellie was absorbed in her Holy God again. But her body was wasting away, and it was a marvel to the nuns that she lived for two months longer, days of torture becoming weeks of agony. She could receive the one thing she lived for—daily Communion, after which her thanksgiving would last frequently for three hours—on one occasion the whole day. "Her fortitude in suffering was heroic," wrote the Bishop of Cork. "She was afflicted with many maladies, among them caries of the jawbone. The wound had to be treated with disinfectants every day, which caused the child intense pain. She endured the agony without a complaint or even an exclamation, always clasping the crucifix tightly in her little hands." "Holy God suffered far more

to die on the Cross for me," said this four-year-old. Yet in other ways she was nothing but a baby, insistent that she must have a white dress in which to receive Holy Communion, as a coloured one was not suitable. She would arrange the straw for the Christmas crib herself: "There must be no lumps in Holy God's bed." Her silent communings with God became daily longer and more frequent, and if they questioned her about them, she would say: "Holy God says I must not speak of these things."

She would predict small matters, saying innocently that Holy God told her such and such would happen, and she proved to be right. She declared that she would die on "His own day," and on a Sunday she died. Her grave in the local cemetery became a shrine, and exactly a year and a week after her death her remains were transferred to the Convent cemetery in the presence of a well-known priest, her nurse and other reliable witnesses. To the great astonishment of all, the diseased-racked body was found intact, the fingers quite flexible, and the hair had grown a little. The silver medal round her neck was as bright as though it had just been polished. Everything, in effect, was as on the

day of her death. It was only after Nellie's death that the Decree was granted at Rome giving permission for children who had come to the age of reason to receive Holy Communion—perhaps through her intercession, through whom many people have received the cure of their diseases and a solution of their troubles.

Four years old—the diseased tuberculous child of tuberculous parents. One of the children who would never have been born if the eugenists had their way. Four years old, praying for the Holy Father and for the Church. “Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come to Me; for the Kingdom of Heaven is for such.”

Again, let us take a contrast in souls. Three years ago, in June 1925, there fell dead in the street a Dublin labourer. In early manhood, it was said of him that he would literally sell the boots off his feet for drink. At the age of twenty-five, he suddenly announced his intention of taking a pledge of total abstinence for three months. He kept it to the day of his death. For the greater part of his life his wages were from fifteen shillings to nineteen shillings a week. His appearance has been described as of “a very commonplace type,

poorly clad but clean.” After his death his nearest living relative, who had known him intimately for thirty years, told the story of the real life of this silent man. Remember, this was a man who only died three years ago : he was living this life when we were living ours. Every day he rose at 2 a.m. He had slept for fourteen years on a plank bed with a wooden pillow. Half a blanket covered him : when it was very cold, a few sacks. From 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. he prayed on his knees on the bed with his arms outstretched. He was always at the church door by 5 a.m., waiting for the doors to be opened for the first Mass at 5.30 a.m. While waiting, he knelt by the railings on his bare knees, which he hid by pulling his coat round him, and when the doors were opened, made the Stations of the Cross in the same manner. He always knelt straight up, never used a prayer-book, and never raised his eyes. After Mass, he went back to his room, heated some cocoa and ate some bread, and went to his work, for which his employers say he was never late. It was his custom to make special reparation for blasphemy, if he encountered other men who blasphemed. When in good health, he took no midday meal, but spent the time in prayer. On leaving work,

he went back to his room, where his sister had his meal prepared, and this he ate on his knees, and it generally consisted of black tea, and bread dipped in the liquid in which fish had been boiled, or something similar. After his meal he did not rise from his knees, but began his devotions and continued them until half-past ten at night. He used to say an incredible number of vocal prayers without using a book, and then he would turn to litanies, in various prayer-books, to which he was devoted. He had a special devotion to the Holy Ghost, and he never began to read a book without invoking the help of the Holy Ghost. The time spent on his knees after his supper was largely given to spiritual reading, and his books were found in a trunk in his room. He was never tired of reading the Lives of the Saints; and his biographer tells us that his favourite description of St. Teresa, St. Mary of Egypt, and other women saints was: "They were great girls." He probably had no spiritual director in the ordinary sense of the word, and the only two priests who knew him intimately are dead. His alms-giving was extraordinary. He lived on between six and ten shillings a week, and gave away the rest. In less than two years his subscriptions to the

Chinese Mission amounted to £24, and at this time he had also been saving the £100 or so he contributed to the education of poor priests. It was not until 1923, at over sixty years of age, that he had to go to hospital, where heart-disease was diagnosed. For the next two years he was often ill, and, without his wages, very needy. In April 1925 he tried to resume his work, still continuing the greater part of his extraordinary penances. In June he dropped dead.

“God does it all,” he said to his sister when she referred to his way of life. What can one say? Had he dropped dead on a football field, who would have blamed him for wasting his life? No one. Ever cheerful, ever kindly, he did his work, and lived his hidden life as alone with his God as though he had been one of the Fathers of the Desert, doing penance for all those thousands of souls who do none for their sins. What made him do such a thing? What made him live such an incredible life? All he had to say was: “God does it all.”

The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and of the many who are called, it is a strange motley few heroic souls who are chosen to keep alight the mystical fires of intercession, reparation, adoration and charity.

These are the leaders, the heroes. But many hearts are warmed by the blood, which such great souls cause to circulate strongly through the Mystical Body of Christ which is His Church. There is a growth of spiritual life, a development of interior life, of which there can be no statistics, except in Heaven. But there are indications which we may observe, such as the demand for retreats, the sale of spiritual books, which point to a hopeful state of affairs. Indisputably there is a movement among ordinary Catholic layfolk to discover for themselves more about the great doctrines of their Faith, and more about the great laws of prayer, and of the interior life. Outside the Church, the restlessness of the world is not entirely a material restlessness ; part of it is a spiritual restlessness which, although in many cases it leads men and women to listen to any and every spiritual quack, and to try every prescription that is preached or printed, declares it can increase the spiritual stature or enlighten the eyes of the spirit. Nevertheless, restlessness is better than lethargy, because a vagrant may at any moment find himself on the high road to the Kingdom of Heaven, and the weary and dissatisfied, tossing and turning, may at last be-

think themselves of the pillow of the breast of God.

Between the standard-bearers of the Faith in this age, such as the souls, young and old, rich and poor, whose lives I have referred to in this lecture, and those who are stumbling in outer darkness of doubt and fear, seeking a nameless home, there are a countless number of men and women who are sincerely seeking to know and to do the will of God.

Now the will of God for every man is plainly taught in the Gospels. "Be you therefore perfect." It should therefore be our continual prayer: that God in His mercy would grant us grace sufficient to make preparation for the perfect life. What is this preparation? It is one in which all the saints, all the mystics, all the contemplatives are in agreement. It is composed of two parts: the practice of prayer, and the fulfilment of the will of God as shown by the events and duties of our common daily life.

In these lectures we have considered contemplative prayer, but perhaps we have not sufficiently considered the practical details of the practice of prayer. The first objection likely to be made is: "Oh, but I have no time for long prayers." Yet somehow people find time for

almost everything else. "Anything is possible to the man who can *will*." The best thing to do is to make a good new beginning of the practice of prayer every day. And the best way to do this is to hear Mass daily, and receive daily Communion. Impossible? No, try it. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is an action, not a mere form of prayer. It is the same Sacrifice as that of Calvary; nothing less than the offering by Jesus Christ of Himself, as a sacrifice to His Father, for us sinners. Holy Communion is the greatest means of of grace. Let the Divine Workman come into your soul and work there in His own way, and see what abilities of peace, charity and fortitude He will make there for you. Don't imagine it will be an irksome hour in a trying day. For the slight physical discomfort, you will receive in exchange a deep sense of safety and of peace, of being right with God, and of beginning right with man. It will do your health good rather than harm, even if you feel tired at first. God is the Master of life and of health, and He will not let you suffer for your generosity. On the contrary, He will reward you, even in the matter of health. Holy Communion is an oasis in any hard life, and it is the best part of a

happy one. Compare what people get out of that hour, and what they get out of pleasure. Compare the unfading good, with the fading decaying good of a moment. The world is often dismal and boring because it is full of people to whom Mammon, not conduct, is three parts of life; jaded pseudo-intellectuals who live by what they see, for what they see, who have no religion unless it is, as Oliver Wendell Holmes says, "as a flag and not as a rudder." The visible disassociated from the invisible is a market-place; associated with the invisible, it is a glorious vestibule to eternity. The best preparation for prayer is a God-conquered life. Stripped of all tangling selfishness, it is bare, clear-cut like a cross which is the symbol of God's prayer to man, and man's hope for God.

Holy Mass, Holy Communion—these provide nourishment, grace, dynamics, a sense of proportion which is humility, or the beginning of humility. The next thing necessary is *to convert the mind to God's point of view*. It is useless to attempt to convert the flesh, until the mind is converted. You have to think God's thoughts after Him. What made Him think of creating me? Why does He continue to give me life, to send these circumstances, to permit this

environment, that opportunity? Why am I here, concerned about the contemplative life in the world? Nothing would have been easier than for some small happening to have hindered my interest. And if I am interested, is it because God is calling *me* to a contemplative life in the world? And if so, how shall I best convert my mind to the contemplative point of view?

Some people imagine that saints manage with their hearts and wills without much training or use of the mind. Yet have you observed that the failure of many in spiritual matters is due to the lack of a converted mind, and of a sanctified imagination? Imagination faces the future as memory does the past. It is free and unlimited, a picture of what is and what might be. Driving force comes from, first, imagination. The thing imagined is soon emotionally felt, and then, sooner or later, acted on. A good Catholic is a man who has a vision of what God wants him to be. What is your vision of yourself to-morrow? Do you dream of yourself having more money, more influence, or more holiness? This is important, because to-morrow is going to be an enlargement of to-day. If you would love Our Lord, you must think about Him, visualise Him. Love is a fire which is fed by

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thought, vision, imagination. No one drifts into goodness. If your vision of Christ dies, then love dies, then strenuous activity dies. All desires and impulses are strengthened by a flow of imagery. Every one conceals a life of unknown depth: it is the life of thought and imagination. You cannot be better than the thing upon which your imagination dwells. What you dwell upon *most* of the time is what you are, what you love, and what God sees you to be. Imagine and realise Heaven if you would be heavenly. Half our folly and sin would be done with for ever, if we would project ourselves mentally into *the moment after*.

Why do we so often imagine in marble and build in brick? It is possible to contemplate an ideal life, but to translate nothing into action. A beautiful and trained imagination must have behind it a strong and consecrated *will*. If all the things visioned by good people and resolved by them had been done, they would all be saints, and there would be little sin or sorrow left in the world. When a thing imagined is not put into practice, one is weaker for the vision, because spiritual energy is lost, and nothing is *done*. People think, but they do not *think things out*. We need not only a vision of God,

but the practice of the presence of God. After moments of spiritual desire and vision, the devil tries to distract us from putting into action what we have seen and desired. Your will is the citadel of your personality. It is free, but only so to this extent : that it decides with what invisible powers it will become confederate. The invisible powers of angels or devils are much stronger than we are. Your will is directed by God or the devil : your freedom is the awful power to choose which it is to be. The refusal to choose is itself a choice—for the devil. When inclination urges in one direction and conscience points in another, the will decides, action follows, and character is formed by action. The resolve and permanent intention of the soul is what we really are. If your resolve is to be a contemplative, to be wise and prudent, not with small earthly, but with great heavenly wisdom, to mirror the truth in your life and so to bring God into the world around you, to be a man after God's own heart,—then God sees you to be such. For the question is not : “ How often have you slipped ? ” but “ What is your direction ? ” We often wonder why we fail to perform what we set out to do in the spiritual life. The reason is not far to seek : we have not,

carefully counting and agreeing to the possible cost, *fully intended* to do or become that thing. A single good resolution may be made in the midst of a life not wholly willed to God. That resolution is broken because new wine is put into old bottles. The resolution has small chance of being kept unless the entire life faces in the direction of God. We realise that weak characters do the worst things, that all difficulties come their way ; and, on the other hand, that space clears round the man who knows his own mind, and the world turns aside to let any man pass who knows whither he is going. Huxley said that “ the most valuable result of all education is to make oneself do the thing one has to do, when it ought to be done, whether one likes it or not.” But how is this to come about ?

We feel that it is not in our power to change ourselves. But there is one part of our nature that we should control : it is the will. Tell our Blessed Lord that there, in your will, in spite of fears and doubts and weaknesses, you are His for ever. Even when you feel you do not really desire the highest things, you may desire to desire. Get your mind off yourself and on God, and your fears and doubts will come round to obey your will.

With our thoughts and our will turned towards God, the practice of prayer is easy. Begin to pray and God will be your teacher. Don't become self-conscious and mistake the means for the end. Don't be fond of far-fetched explanations. As Fr. Daniel Considine used to say, if you are praying for a person, there is no need to explain to Almighty God exactly what relation he is to you. Don't imagine that, because you have begun to be a man or woman of prayer, you are no longer an ordinary human being. Don't explain a fit of temper as being caused by the devil when it was caused by indigestion.

On the other hand, once you have given your mind and will to the business of making yourself a servant of God, you must expect great things from Him. "Expect the Lord, do manfully. And let thy heart take courage: and wait thou for the Lord." God Himself can do nothing to you, with you, or through you without faith. Believe that even with us—the self-opinionated, the self-absorbed, the unreliable, the uncharitable—He can do everything necessary to make us in His own likeness—a saint. This is not pride; it is humility, plus faith. The only argument God

wants to come to your help is your avowed need.

Live quietly. Piety that is paraded goes off in smoke—and sulphur. Cloister your soul with God, letting only those friends who also love His Coming into the holy place around that Holy of Holies, and keeping acquaintances in the outer court. You may not know God so much as some other people do, nor understand Him so well, but you should understand Him *as* no one else can. “Each soul of the beloved of the King has his own secret with Him,” says St. Bernard, and nobody can be to Him what you can—His ideal of you. The best work of charity is not to be obtrusively kind to others, but to try and help Our Lord with the work *He* is doing in their souls. And for ourselves, we should try and meet with Christ in our neighbour. Ideally, communion with others should be communion with God. The test of amusement and the social side of life is its effect on our prayer. Do we come back with minds refreshed, or with a thousand distractions? “He grudges us no holiday if we will only take Him with us.” The contemplative in the world must make his own observations, and, from those observations, his

rule on this point for his spiritual life. Our contemplative life *is* our life—or it is humbug. And if it is our life, then everything else must be judged according to its profit or loss to that interior life.

As for distractions, even when we have so ruled our life that there is no especial cause for them, they will come about our minds in time of prayer like flies. You may know the old story of St. Bernard, who complained, in the hearing of a peasant, of his distractions in prayer. The peasant said he never had any such thing. St. Bernard, who was riding on horseback at the time, promised the peasant the horse, if he could say one Our Father without distractions. The peasant began, but suddenly, halfway, he broke off, to ask : “ Will you give me the saddle and bridle, too, Father ? ” Don’t bother about distractions unless they are sinful, which they never are unless they are wilful ; unless we deliberately put our prayer aside to amuse ourselves with some other mental occupation. A good way to cheat the devil who delights in sending these intellectual flies to tease us, is to offer for someone else who is finding prayer difficult, all the difficulties we have in prayer. The main thing is,

you want to pray, and that is why you are at your prayers. Therefore God is with you, and God is pleased. God is always waiting for us when we turn to prayer. He is always there before us. St. Bernard pointed that out to his monks, saying that although they rose for Matins long before the poorest labourer rose to his work, God was waiting for them.

The danger of distractions is much less if we go to a quiet place to make our prayer. Our Lord bade us do this. "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret. . . ." The contemplative in the world must find his own cell, and his own cloister. The more God draws him to the contemplative life, which is the only real life, the more he will love solitude and seek it. We may well thank God for Catholic churches, usually open, where we may find Our Lord present in His Humanity and in His Divinity, as He was at Nazareth and on the shores of the Lake of Galilee when He made a fire of coals for His Apostles. If people would only realise the help of this opportunity to be in a quiet place close to Our Lord! A Catholic church, great or small, is not only to worship God in, but to

worship God *with*. We must use our parish church. Everything in it is made to help us pray. The statues and pictures recall the example of victorious saints and martyrs whom we are trying to follow. St. Gregory says : " It is one thing to worship images, and another to learn from them whom we must adore." All the saints in their statues are witnessing to the invisible God whom, by faith, they followed heroically. We all use images, mental or material. The ultra-Protestant must worship God in the image of his own consciousness. The very word God is an image. He makes a mental image, which God accepts ; and the Catholic image is a concrete thought, made in material substance to be permanent. All Catholic symbols are like a window of suggestive beauty in the temple of truth, through which the clear radiance of eternity comes, falling with softened splendour upon the minds of men.

We ought to do our part to keep our churches quiet. There is, in some parts, a growing carelessness about talking in church while other people are praying, and about rattling rosaries and slamming doors. It is bad spiritual manners. Worse, if we do so, our carelessness may be helping to dishearten some poor soul who has

only a limited time for prayer, and is not succeeding very well in collecting his thoughts. Public opinion will set the note of silence, or carelessness about silence, in every church. The devil is quite able to provide men with enough distractions to break down their attempts at real prayer, without our taking a hand, and helping him by rushing about a church as though it were a railway station. No business connected with the vestments or the choir is one atom so important as the poorest prayer of the weakest soul. We should constitute ourselves the guardians of that holy silence before the altar of God where the weary may rest, the sorrowful find comfort, and the prayerful learn their first or their further lessons in prayer.

But more than a quiet church is necessary for contemplative prayer. We must pray fervently that God will make His own closet in our hearts. As a Carthusian monk of our days has said : “ Christ will make in your heart a silence which only He can make.” You can easily bear such a silence away with you when your prayer time is over, taking it back to your duties, for you can easily give your mind to two things at once when one of those things is the Presence of God ; just as one can work in a room conscious of

the presence of someone we love, without being disturbed by them. We must never cease to pray for this grace of the conscious Presence of God, until, by exercise, we have accustomed our mind to be receptive, and God will not let us prepare for Him a guest chamber and then not come and occupy it. This grace is the beginning of wisdom, and the beginning of that prayer which is both without effort and without ceasing. It is also the beginning of sanctity, for constant contact with God is the only thing which can educate our souls on the heroic scale of sanctity. Let us, therefore, pray with all our might and with all our persistence for this great gift which brings all others in its wake.

As long as sufficient time—somewhere in the day, preferably first thing—is given to the consideration of eternal truths and the practice of prayer and communion with Jesus Christ, the day may be full of all kinds of duties and occupations without disturbing our contemplative life. St. Bernard and St. Augustine were constantly occupied with affairs of state in the cities and countries in which they lived, but they saw the interests of God in everything, and, seeing God, they saw everything else in its right setting and proportion. History is full of instances of men

and women in the world, soldiers and statesmen like St. Martin and Blessed Thomas More, mothers and hospital nurses like St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. Catherine of Genoa, queens and servant-maids like St. Margaret of Scotland and St. Zita, kings and footmen like St. Louis and Brother Lawrence, whose rule of life was a contemplative one. In the events and happenings of the day, in the circumstances of their life, they looked for the will of God and saw His wise love for them, and adored it, trying to fill their place in the world to His greater glory, looking on each event as a tool to shape them in His Likeness, and therefore welcoming joys and sorrows alike as precious gifts, warm from the hand of God their Creator. They belong to the unseen Order of the will of God, whose habit is, on one man a shoemaker's apron, or a king's purple, on another a lawyer's gown, or a soldier's khaki. Their talents and their natural good qualities they turn to the glory of God ; their faults and limitations serve to keep them humble ; and so nothing is wasted, but everything is turned to the purposes of God. Their whole life becomes a Divine Office of praise and obedience, and the simplest and humblest duties are done in the spirit of prayer. St. Teresa

said : “ God walks among the pots and pipkins.”

“ Lord of the pots and pipkins, since I have no time to be
A saint by doing lovely things, and vigiling with Thee,
By watching in the twilight-dawn, and storming Heaven’s
gates,

Make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the
plates !

Lord of the pots and pipkins, please, I offer Thee for
souls

The tiresomeness of tea-leaves and the sticky porridge
bowls !

Remind me of the things I need, not just to save the
stairs,

But to that I may perfectly lay tables into prayers.

Although I must have Martha hands, I have a Mary
mind ;

And when I clean the boots I try Thy sandals, Lord, to
find.

I think of how they trod our earth what time I scrub the
floor :

Accept this meditation when I haven’t time for more.

Warm all the kitchen with Thy Love, and light it with
Thy peace.

Forgive the worrying, and make the grumbling to cease !
Lord, who laid breakfast on the shore, forgive the world
which saith :

‘ Can any good thing come to God out of poor Nazareth? ’”

C. R. H.

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The first need of the world to-day is for those who will *pray*; the second, for those who will *suffer*, and only third is the need for those who will *work*. Some of the religious work done to-day fails because it is *only* work. When this is so, there is a danger of an atmosphere of fuss and self-importance in which sins breed like germs in a fever-swamp, and the spirit of Christ is conspicuous by its absence. The need for souls who will offer their sufferings for the coming of Christ's Kingdom in the world—that "making up" of the sufferings of Christ of which St. Paul speaks—is answered by the springing up of vocations to *reparation*, in heroic souls to whom pain is gain and weakness is strength. There are many such souls in London alone, bedridden and unknown, or sometimes making an outer circle of spiritual sentinels around some contemplative convent, known only to each other and to the nuns, giving their lives, moment by moment, drop by drop, to the will of God who has made suffering their vocation, lending Him their poor bodies that, in them, Christ may suffer still for the saving of the world. There was once a parish priest in the north of England who was deeply distressed at the hard hearts of his parishioners, who were

very lukewarm. He had exhorted them, and he had prayed, all to no avail. He went to consult the Curé d'Ars. The holy Curé listened to his story of how he had tried everything without avail, and then he asked: "Have you tried blood?" The priest went home . . . and tried blood. God accepted that one man's resisting the devil unto blood, and the parish was converted. The scourge is thought of by many of us as a mediæval instrument of penance. We smile the contemptuous smile of the really enlightened, and involuntarily shiver. But there remain the countless army who are not wise unto sobriety but wise unto love, and who associate themselves with Christ scourged at the pillar. Another priest, this time of our day, lately dead, was famous for his power of reading souls. He was known to be intimate with Our Lord as one friend with another, said to see Him every day when he said Mass. Death revealed a detail—a scourge, stained with blood. Yet that man was the gentlest of the gentle, always tender with the delicate health of others, well known for his wit and superb sense of humour, able on occasion to play the part of the courtly and diplomatic gentleman which, by birth, he was.

Few, perhaps, are called by Our Lord and

given the grace to share, to this extent, in the active mysteries of His Passion. But there is penance enough for the would-be contemplative in the world in the strict observance of charity. And there no one can go too far, nor endanger their health. Generous love can put no bounds to its expression in the virtue of charity.

There is penance, discipline and good works enough for anyone in making a complete riddance of all criticism of others, in never blaming nor listening to blame that has any unkindness in it, in never excusing oneself, in always being the servant of others without appearing to be so. "We ought to desire rather to lose our life than, in mind or mouth or deed, defile charity," says Blessed Richard Rolle, the English mystic. "We become very stupid to the world, but poor wounded souls come to us ; they know that he who keeps his tongue, will not plant bitter words like barbed stings in their wounds. Christ is the corner of defence to that man." Tauler says that one of the signs of a sincerely converted man is that he "interprets everything for the best." He preached fiercely against the sins against charity which turned pious people into hypocrites and made poor sinners detest them. He spoke of the

“sharp ruthless words, whereby they, spiritually speaking, slay their neighbour in the hearts of others.”

In these two virtues—prayer and charity—we may join the contemplatives in the cloister, and help them in their work. Whatever suffering comes our way, we may welcome as a third privilege and share in the contemplative life, a share in the carrying of the Cross, in the Passion of Our Lord. Alike in the vocation to practise these two or three virtues, the means and the character of our particular vocation will be, as I have said before, determined by the circumstances of our life and duty. Don't try to be something that does not fit in with your circumstances. If you are the busy mother of a family, don't try to live like a nun. You will only make everything wrong around you. It was said of St. Jane de Chantal, a married woman with several children and the mistress of a great house, when St. Francis of Sales, then Bishop of Geneva, began to teach her how to live a contemplative life in the world: “Madame's old director made her pray at certain hours, and the whole household was upset by it; but her new director, my Lord of Geneva, makes her pray all day long, and no-

body is upset or put to any inconvenience whatever." God is seen in events. God is met with in each duty. To pray in the chapel when our duty lies in the drawing-room, or in the kitchen, is breaking an appointment with God, for God was waiting for us, not in the chapel, but in the place of duty. On the other hand, to bustle about the house when we should be in the chapel is to go without the strength God prepares for us in our prayer-time, by means of which we may go through our duties in the spirit of prayer and charity.

Each of us has a work to do for God that only we can do. If we don't do it, it will remain undone for all eternity. Each of us can put forth one unique flower of praise to God, which may blossom in Paradise. What is your flower? Patient prayer of intercession, patient suffering, patient praise, patient service, heroic martyrdom, cloistered obedience, holy motherhood, hard study in the service of the things of God, hard manual work in poverty—of whatever *kind* it is, it will be perfect in the *degree* in which it is done in the spirit of praise and devotion to the will of God. God has laid up in you a likeness to one of His infinite perfections, and the realising of that is your vocation.

Our modern world makes new problems for us, but not for God. His Throne is no more distant, nor His grace less, than it was in the days when St. Teresa reformed the Carmelites, St. Bruno meditated in the wilderness, or St. Francis walked singing under the olive trees of Assisi. He was with men in those days ; He is with us now. "Spiritual natures are on the highest hills of God," says Bishop Ullathorne, "and there is nothing above them but Himself. God is everywhere, but there is one point in the universe where He comes to us—that is in the centre of our being."

See God in every event, have a sense of humour when you consider yourself, never say an unkind word, never let a day go by without dedicating some time to prayer, and that will do for a beginning. God will teach you the rest as you go along. Never give up, lower the standard, or button your coat over the badge. It is a steep road that leads to the stars, but ahead of us are people who, at one time, were more hopeless than we are. You have what all men are seeking—the Truth. If you are inclined to wonder how holy you can become, the answer is, as holy as God can make you. Ask yourself not : what can I learn of the science of prayer,

but what can the Holy Spirit of God teach me?

We have reviewed, briefly and incompletely, what has been done by the mystics and contemplatives, both in the cloister and in the world. We know well enough what the world needs. The world thinks it needs progress, forgetting that the only true progress is walking with God. What it does need is peace and the knowledge of God, and this can only come about by the spreading of the spirit of prayer. Ought you to seek the contemplative life? There can be but one answer. Ought you to prepare yourself to receive it? Can you do so? Yes, by the grace of God.

A contemplative monk, asked by a layman how the wonderful power of the contemplative life could be made to overflow, even more widely, into the world, answered: "Begin yourself."

APPENDIX

THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ARE SUGGESTED to the student of *Catholic Mysticism*. Taken in the following order, they will form a course of spiritual reading at once simple and profound. These books will suggest others, especially the two which are recommended as books of reference.

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|---|--|
| AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTICAL
LIFE | THE ABBÉ LEJEUNE
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| A SPIRITUAL MANUAL | PÈRE FOCH, S.J.
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| PRAYER AND INTELLIGENCE | JACQUES MARITAIN
(Sheed & Ward) |
| THE LIFE OF PRAYER | BARON VON HUGEL
(Dent & Sons) |
| PRAYER FOR ALL TIMES, I., II. | PÈRE CHARLES, S.J.
(Sands & Co.) |
| ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVI-
DENCE | PÈRE DE CAUSSADE, S.J.
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| ALL FOR JESUS | FATHER FABER
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| THE VIRTUES OF THE DIVINE CHILD | FR. D. CONSIDINE, S.J.
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| MYSTICISM | MONSIGNOR BENSON
(Sands & Co.) |
| HOW TO PRAY | THE ABBÉ GROU, S.J.
(Thomas Baker) ✓ |
| THE INTERIOR LIFE | VERY REV. FR. JOSEPH TISSOT
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND PRAYER | MME. L'ABBESSE DE ST.
CÉCILE
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne) |
| THE SPIRITUAL LIFE | ST. JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL.
Sands & Co. |

- CHRIST IN HIS MYSTERIES** By ABBOT MARMION, O.S.B.
(Sands & Co.)
- CHRIST THE LIFE OF THE SOUL** By ABBOT MARMION, O.S.B.
(Sands & Co.)
- CHRIST THE IDEAL OF THE MONK** By ABBOT MARMION, O.S.B.
(Sands & Co.)
- WESTERN MYSTICISM** DOM CUTHBERT BUTLER
(Constable)
- ON PRAYER AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE** By ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.
Edited by THE VERY REV.
FR. HUGH POPE, O.P.
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)
- STUDIES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MYSTICS** JOSEPH MARÈCHAL, S.J.
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)
- CATHOLIC MYSTICISM** ALGAR THOROLD
(Kegan Paul)
- THE MONASTERY OF THE GRAND CHARTREUSE** By A CARTHUSIAN MONK
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)
- THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE** By A CARTHUSIAN MONK
(The Angelus Company, Norwood)
- THE LIFE OF ST. TERESA** Written by herself,
Translated by D. LEWIS
(Thos. Baker)
- THE WORKS OF ST. TERESA** (in several vols.) Translated by the BENE-
DICTINE NUNS OF
STANBROOK
(Thos. Baker)
- ST. TERESA** (Notre Dame Series)
(Sands & Co.)
- THE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS** (in several vols.) Translated by D. LEWIS
(Thos. Baker)
- THE LIFE OF ST. BERNARD** DOM LUDDY
(M. H. Gill, & Son, Ltd., Dublin)
- THE VARIOUS WORKS OF DOM DELATTE, O.S.B.**
(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)

A LINK BETWEEN FLEMISH MYSTICS

AND ENGLISH MARTYRS

C. S. DURRANT

(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)

THE VARIOUS WORKS OF ST.

CATHERINE OF SIENNA

(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)

THE LIFE OF GEMMA GALGANI

Translated from the

Italian by FR. A. M.

O'SULLIVAN, O.S.B.

(Sands & Co.)

For a complete review of the subject and to be used perpetually
as books of reference :

THE GRACES OF INTERIOR

PRAYER

PÈRE POULAIN

(Kegan Paul)

A MANUAL OF MYSTICAL

THEOLOGY

FR. DEVINE

(Burns, Oates & Washbourne)

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